Weird Tales

The Unique Magazine

Classics of Weird Literature

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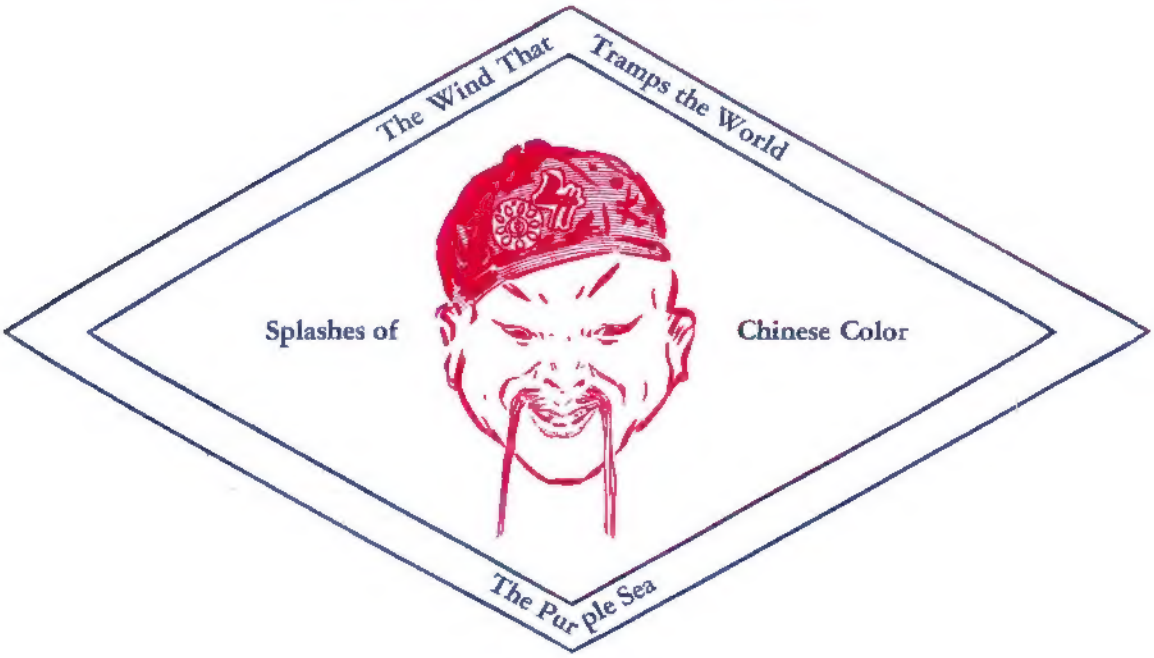

By FRANK OWEN

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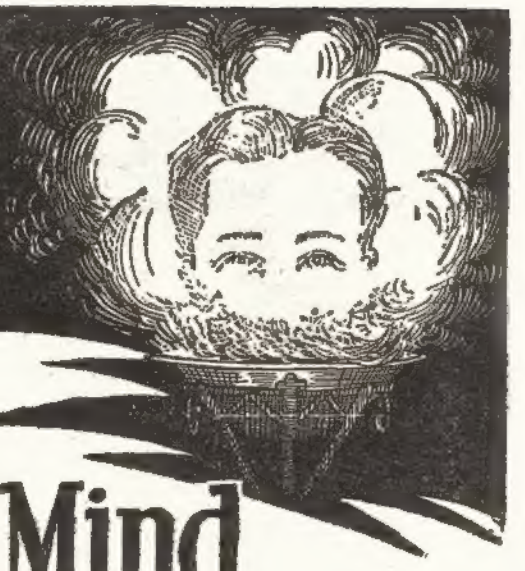

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Weird Tales

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FARNSWORTH WRIGHT, Editor.

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HELIODORE'S BEADS

By MARVIN LUTER HILL

The beads of crystal talked to me:
"We rested there two thousand years
About her throat of ivory,
And dripping down her breast, like tears—
The sweet young breasts of Heliodore,
With her black tresses weighted o'er.
Though dead, she walked upon the shore;
We saw her raise her golden eyes
To the pale beauty of the skies.

"In sleepy dreams, in sleepy dreams,
We saw her dancing on moonbeams
Below the carvèd balustrade.
In level light the river swayed—
Black-amber, melting into jade.
Her breath was sweet with ambergris,
Her hair a thick coil of the dusk;
Her garments breathed a winy musk,
The darkness swooned upon her kiss.
And then she would come back, once more,
And lie down softly, as before.

"The thick years gathered; silence lay
Upon us, like an earthy pall;
We slept and dreamed the years away—
Slept, woke, nor could remember all.
We saw her climb the garden wall;
Her jeweled fingers made a gleam
On the black amber of the stream;
We heard the silver paddles fall,
As the long boat leaped out; she sent
It down to where the low waves went
In idle lapping; one was there
Who kissed the star-gleams from her eyes,
And kissed the jewels from her hair,
As the red moon climbed up the skies.

"The years were bats, that beat upon
The muffled heart and fragile bone;
And we dreamed on, and on, and on,
And on—until our dreams were stone."

NEXT MONTH

A group of amazingly fine stories is to appear in the October issue of WEIRD TALES, on sale September 1.

The House of the Skull

by Arlton Eadie

Ghastly rites were performed in the green temple behind the big house—a weird mystery story of thrills and terrors.

The Druid's Shadow

by Seabury Quinn

A thrill-tale of Druid sacrifice under the weird oak trees of Wales—a smashing story about Jules de Grandin, occultist and ghost-breaker.

The Portal to Power

by Greye La Spina

A thrilling weird serial about a cult of devil-worshippers in a hidden valley in the Rocky Mountains—by the author of "Invaders From the Dark."

The Grave at Goonhilly

by G. G. Pendarves

A wild and terrible fate befell Donald Harkness as he drove his golf ball off the fifth tee—a tale of Valsume the Black Magician and the wresting of a man's soul from his body.

The Silver Curse of Yarlik

by V. K. Kaledin

A thrilling weird tale of an old monastery—a gruesome incident of the war between Poland and the Soviets.

The Mind-Master

by Edmond Hamilton

A powerful, gripping weird-scientific story of a scientist who sought to enslave the world to his ambition.

The Bride Well

by David H. Keller

A whimsical story of Cecil, the Overlord of Cornwall, and how he won his beauteous bride.

These are some of the super-excellent stories that will appear in the October issue of WEIRD TALES

October Issue on Sale September 1

Subscription Rates: $2.50 a year in U. S. or possessions; Canadian $3.00; Foreign $3.50.
WEIRD TALES 840 N. Michigan Ave. Chicago, Ill.

The INVISIBLE

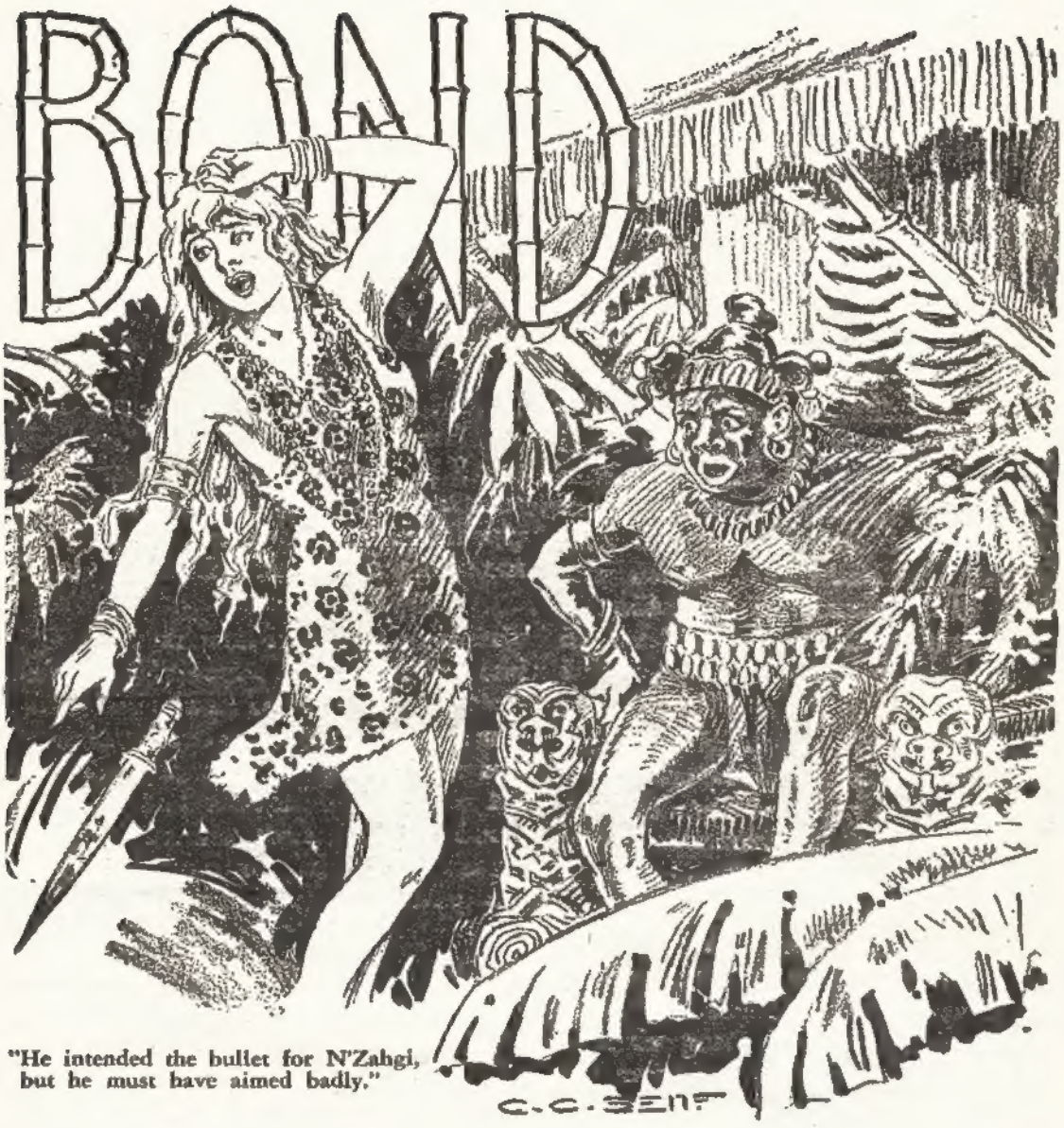
by ARLTON EADIE

THE stranger first hove into sight through the faint, coppery haze of the African dawn. His craft was a native dugout canoe, looted, we subsequently discovered, from one of the villages on the coast which lay, a line of pale purple, about four miles off our port beam. So feeble were his paddle-strokes against the set of the inshore current that it was some time before I realized that he was heading for our ship; it was only when he stood up waving his tattered coat that I understood his plight and rang off the engines to enable a boat to be lowered.

The West Coast of Africa is not what you might term a health resort, but I had never seen such a physical wreck, even there, as the man who was presently hoisted over the side of my ship. Fever he had as a matter of course; he was badly wounded as well, and bore signs of privation which seemed to indicate a long tramp through the bush. Yet his bodily condition, desperate though it was, seemed hardly sufficient to account for the look of agony and horror in his sunken, bloodshot eyes.

"Where are you heading for, Captain?" were his first words as he reached the deck.

"Lagos," I answered, shortly enough, naturally supposing him to be some beach-comber down on his luck.



"He intended the bullet for N'Zahgi, but he must have aimed badly."

"Direct?" he asked.

I shook my head. "We stop at about a dozen factories on the way down to take off trade."

"I'll make it worth your while to cut out the trade and head direct for Lagos," the stranger said. "I am Lord Clengarth."

For a moment I thought the man was indulging in grim satire. Of course one meets with some curious examples of human flotsam on the African seaboard, but that tattered scarecrow's claim to be a member of the British peerage was too tough to be swallowed offhand.

"My steam yacht was wrecked in the Bight some six weeks ago," he went on. "She struck an uncharted reef and only one boat managed to get away. At present I think I'm the sole survivor. I've had an awful time in the bush, Captain, an awful time——"

Then he cut short the palaver by pitching forward on the deck-planks in a dead

faint. We carried him below, and for the next few days he hovered between life and death. During his intervals of consciousness he told me his story, but not in exactly the same order as here set down. I had to piece the tale together from his disjointed utterances, and some of the details he did not divulge until he realized that he was not going to pull through. Here is his story:

I SUPPOSE that, from a theoretical point of view, every soul on board the *Primrose* should have been saved [the stranger began by stating]. When she struck, the sea was calm, the glass steady, and the land within easy rowing distance. If I had but had the sense to have shipped white firemen I might have a different story to tell. It was the lascars who started the trouble. They swarmed up from the stokehold the moment they felt the yacht take the reef, brained the chief engineer when he attempted to handle the reversing-gear, and then started in to loot the ship.

We had to hold them back with our revolvers while we got my niece—the only lady on board—into the lifeboat. It was well for us that we lost no time in doing so. Barely had we got two cables' length from the yacht than the water reached the undrawn fires, exploding the boilers and sending her to the bottom like a stone.

Kemp, the second mate, who was in charge, at once put the lifeboat about, but the only man we picked up was so badly injured that he died before we reached the shore. It was while he was being lifted into the boat that I discovered that Lady Elna was wounded. One of the lascars had flung a knife, inflicting a deep gash in her left shoulder, from which the blood was pouring. Luckily the ship's surgeon, Dr. Tremaine, was in the boat with us. He at once set about rendering first aid, but it was clear that an important artery had been severed and that the girl's condition was grave.

Poor Elna! The voyage which had ended so tragically had been planned as a honeymoon trip, for she had but recently been married to young Sir Leslie Fanshaw, who was also among the survivors.

There were seven of us, all told, in the lifeboat, the others being: the second mate Kemp, Dr. Tremaine, myself, a saloon steward named Leon, and the injured seaman, whose name I never learnt. The craft was by no means overloaded, and we experienced no difficulty in reaching the shore. After waiting some time for a "smooth," Kemp put her head to the rollers and we flashed through the broken water toward the beach.

We had almost reached it, and I was just about to congratulate myself on a safe landing, when a sudden shock seemed to jar every bone in my body. The boat had struck a submerged mass of coral, and the force of the impact had impaled it so firmly on the sharp, upstanding prongs that the backwash left it stranded high and dry. We had gained the shore safely, but the boat was wrecked beyond repair.

We carried the now unconscious Elna above the high-water mark and laid her down in the shade of a tree, and Kemp lost no time in making a survey of our immediate surroundings.

"There are several threads of smoke rising above the bush over yonder," he announced, staring through his binoculars. "It's a native village, or at least an encampment of some sort. We'd better make for it. The coast natives have the reputation of being fairly peaceable, but you never can be sure of 'em. Be on your guard against treachery, but don't shoot except as a last resort."

It turned out to be the usual type of coast village of about a hundred beehive

mud huts, with a larger one—the fetish hut—standing a little apart. The natives seemed friendly enough. They brought us food and gave up two of the huts for our use. They even carried their good intentions so far as to summon the local medicine-man to cure Elna's wound. Of course we had not the slightest intention of allowing him to practise his hocus-pocus on her, but I thought it policy to decline his services in such a way as to avoid giving offense. These witch-doctors have unlimited influence over their devotees, even to matters of life and death, and heaven alone knew how long we should have to remain there before we could signal a passing steamer to take us off.

The moment I caught sight of the witch-doctor I could tell that he was of a different race from the rest of the natives. It is rarely that you meet a Masai on the coast, but this man, whose name was N'Zahgi, had evidently been something of a traveler. According to his own account he had served on steamships and had visited Europe more than once, and he spoke English quite well. It is difficult to judge the age of a native, but I estimated that he was about thirty-five; he was tall and well built, and he evidently possessed unusual bodily strength. On the whole I was rather favorably impressed by the man, and I felt that we were lucky in having fallen in with him. If it had not been for Elna's wound, my mind would have been fairly easy. But her condition grew rapidly worse, until, two days after our landing, Dr. Tremaine took me aside and proposed a desperate expedient.

"There is only one way of giving your niece a chance of pulling through," he told me, "and that is by performing an operation which is very rarely practised, and then only as a last resort. I refer to the transfusion of blood. Unless the blood of some healthy person is conveyed into the depleted veins of the wounded girl she must surely die."

Somewhat surprized, I asked him if he thought it possible to perform such an operation.

"Yes," was his confident answer, "provided, of course, that there is someone willing to give the necessary blood."

"If that is your only difficulty, you can get ready now," I said. "I will give mine."

But the doctor shook his head.

"I fear you are rather too old for such a thing. It doesn't pay to play tricks with the vital fluid of a man on the wrong side of fifty. It would be merely exchanging one life for another."

"Then how about her husband, Sir Leslie?" I asked. "He is young enough, and I know he would volunteer like a shot."

Again the doctor shook his head.

"Sir Leslie is down with fever and as weak as a kitten. He is out of the question."

"Kemp, the second mate, might be willing," I suggested.

"Like yourself, he is far too old."

I thought for a moment.

"Then there only remains the steward, Leon——"

"Impossible," interrupted Dr. Tremaine with a shake of his head that was more decisive than before. "That man is totally unfit for such a thing."

I groaned aloud in my despair.

"Then the operation can not be performed. Elna must die."

In the dead silence which followed my utterance there came a sound of rustling among the foliage of the fringe of red aloes near by; then the leaves parted and N'Zahgi appeared. For a moment I stared at him speechlessly; then indignation took the place of surprize.

"N'Zahgi!" I cried. "You were hiding—listening——"

"And I overheard every word." The Masai drew himself up, fearless and unabashed as he made the cool admission. Then he came a pace nearer and laid his hand on my arm as he went on earnestly: "But there is no need for the Lady Elna to die. I, N'Zahgi, will save her!"

In spite of the heaviness of my heart I laughed aloud.

"And how do you propose to set about it?" I cried with bitter sarcasm. "By muttering your gibberish charms and sacrificing a chicken or two?"

"No, white man—by giving my own blood to save her."

"You?" I gasped.

"Why not?" He asked the question with a kind of simple dignity. "Although my skin is black and hers is white, the blood which flows beneath is the same. My body is strong—not weakened by fever like the white man's. Lady Elna needs blood—then take of mine as much as you will. I give it freely that she may live."

My first impulse was to return a definite refusal; every instinct seemed to cry out against allowing a white girl to have infused into her veins the blood of a naked savage. Dr. Tremaine must have guessed what was passing in my mind, for he laid his hand on my shoulder before I could speak.

"After all, it is her only chance of life," he said gently.

I tried to force my mind to grapple with the problem, but in vain. Then across the black chaos of my indecision there came a gleam of hope.

"Sir Leslie—her husband—he must decide," I cried.

Tremaine shook his head gravely.

"I fear that he is not in a condition either to give his consent or withhold it," he said. "His fever is now at its height, and he is delirious. It is you who must decide, and quickly, too. Come, what is your answer?"

For a while I stood silent, my mind torn by indecision, a vague foreboding of coming evil in my heart. At last I bowed my head in assent.

"Let the thing be done," I said. "And may God forgive me if I have decided wrong."

RIGHT from the moment that the operation was completed there seemed to be no doubt as to its complete success. As I watched the warm color returning to Elna's waxen cheeks I felt my former vague fears vanishing.

"You have saved her life, N'Zahgi," I cried, impulsively turning to the witch-doctor, who was standing in the center of the hut while Tremaine fixed a bandage over the incision in his arm. "How can I reward you? I will take you to England—I will make you rich for life."

N'Zahgi folded his arms across his massive chest as he shook his head.

"I do not want your money, white man, nor do I wish to visit your land again," he returned with, it seemed, a hint of contempt in his voice.

"Then how can I repay you?" I insisted, puzzled not a little by his manner.

For a full minute the Masai remained silently pondering. Then he raised his head.

"Soon will I name my reward — and claim it, too! Till then farewell, white man. N'Zahgi has spoken."

As he quitted the hut he turned, and for a moment his dark eyes rested on the sleeping girl in a manner I did not like.

DURING the ensuing three weeks we took it in turns to keep a continuous lookout from the vantage-point of a little rocky hill near the village, but no

distant plume of smoke on the horizon rewarded our vigil.

Lady Elna's condition continued steadily to improve; so much so, that I more than once proposed that we should attempt to make our way along the coast in the hope of reaching Accra, or some other town within British territory.

At first the others overruled my advice, but as day followed day with the circle of the horizon void and empty, the rest gradually began to come round to my views, finally going so far as to consult N'Zahgi in the hope of his consenting to provide us with guides and bearers for the journey. But the wily savage counseled delay.

"Why face the danger and fatigue of a journey through strange tribes?" he said. "Why not stay here in safety and comfort till a ship passes?"

The second mate greeted this advice with a dubious growl.

"That's all very well—provided ships do occasionally pass near enough to be sighted," he said, running his hand through his gray beard. "But if the coast is dangerous we might cool our heels here forever."

The witch-doctor shrugged his massive shoulders.

"At least you must stay here until the moon is at its full," he said. "Then you may go."

Sir Leslie looked at the man sharply. Ever since he had learnt the part that N'Zahgi had played in his young wife's recovery Leslie had taken a violent dislike to the savage.

"Why must we wait here until it is full moon?" he demanded suspiciously.

Again N'Zahgi shrugged.

"It is merely one of the superstitions of the ignorant black man," he explained smoothly. "They consider it a night of good omen."

And, for the first time since we had met, I noticed that the witch-doctor smiled.

WHILE, a few days later, Tremaine and I were sitting in our hut, he made a somewhat startling remark.

"Have you noticed the manner in which our esteemed devil-doctor has been behaving lately?" he began by asking. "He seems to be getting too fond of parading his authority, and generally acting the guardian angel over Lady Elna. I am far from forgetting that he practically saved the girl's life; but I don't like his manner, nevertheless. If it weren't for the utter absurdity of the thing, I'd be inclined to say that he has fallen in love with her."

In spite of the fact that his words confirmed my own impressions, I tried to treat the matter lightly.

"By the way," Tremaine went on, "did you notice those strange marks on the fellow's chest?"

I nodded. "I thought they were the scars of old wounds."

"You're wrong. Kemp has traded along the coast for years, and he tells me that they are the signs of a secret society called the *Ghu-Fanti*, otherwise the 'Red Drinkers'."

"Sounds like the name of a Russian boozing club," I suggested flippantly.

"If what Kemp says is true, it is far from being a laughing matter for us," said the doctor gravely. "He has been telling me of some of the rites of their secret and obscure cult. I do not wish to harrow your feelings, but I may tell you that the sacrifice of human victims is one of the least revolting of their ceremonies. I am not over-squeamish on the subject of anatomy, but some of the things Kemp described nearly made me sick."

"Probably he was twisting your ankle—old sailors are adepts at that form of amusement. Anyway, N'Zahgi's doings

will not interest us after the next twenty-four hours are past." I pointed upward to where a pale yellow light was stealing through the massive tree trunks and festooned vines of the jungle. "N'Zahgi has promised that we shall leave here on the night of the first full moon, and unless I am out of my reckoning it will be at its full tomorrow night."

As I spoke the words I became aware of the deep note of a native drum sounding in the far distance.

ON THE following day I had no sooner taken up my post on the little knoll which served as a lookout post than I heard a frenzied shout coming from the direction of the huts.

"Where's Lady Elna? I can't find her anywhere—she has vanished!"

I at once left my post and hastened toward the white-faced and gesticulating Leslie, and at the same moment Dr. Tremaine and the mate appeared at the door of the other hut. By their bewildered looks it was evident that his shout had roused them from their afternoon siesta.

"Oh, there's probably nothing to get alarmed about," said the doctor, when he learnt the cause of the summons. "She may have wandered into one of the other huts." He looked toward the village as he spoke, and the words died away on his lips.

At this time of the day it was customary for scores of women to be seated before the doors of the huts, grinding corn, weaving native fiber cloth, or busy at the numerous menial tasks which their lords deemed it beneath their dignity to perform. But now not one was to be seen. Even the naked babies who usually sprawled in the sun were gone. More significant still, the cooking-fires had been allowed to go out—a most unusual occurrence.

"Why, the place is empty!" Kemp shouted. "Every blamed nigger has slung his hook. What's in the wind now?"

In the dead silence which followed, every man's eyes sought and searched his neighbor's face, trying to guess his thoughts, not daring to voice his own.

It was the doctor who spoke first. "I don't like the look of this at all," he muttered; then: "And where's the steward got to?"

A single glance was sufficient to show that he was not in the huts, neither did our loud and repeated shouts cause him to make his appearance.

"Come to think of it, I haven't seen the fellow since last night," said the mate thoughtfully. "Just as the moon was rising I saw him come out of his hut and walk toward the path that leads into the bush. I thought that he, like myself, could not sleep because of that infernal drum—it was sounding all night long, you remember."

"Yes—and it's sounding now," interrupted Tremaine, holding up his hand. "Listen!"

Far away, deep in the trackless jungle, the savage tom-toms were again lifting up their weird and tuneless voices. One is apt to get queer ideas in moments of mental stress; to me the barbaric music seemed the essence and embodiment of the very soul of Africa—fierce, mystic, unknowable.

A sudden frightened oath from Kemp roused me from my revery.

"There's devil's work going on over there!" he cried, waving his hand toward the dense woods. "It's the call of the *Ghu-Fanti* that they're sounding. It's the summons of the 'Red Drinkers'—the invitation to the feast of blood!"

THE memory of our search through the tunnel-like trails of that steaming jungle remains in my mind like a hideous nightmare. We divided our

forces, Kemp and the nearly distraught Leslie taking one direction, and the doctor and myself another. For a long time after leaving the others we walked in silence, and when Tremaine at last spoke it was to ask a question.

"Has it not struck you as being curious that we did not hear the sound of a struggle or cry when Lady Elna was carried off?"

I paused in my stride and glanced at him. There seemed some veiled meaning behind his casual tone.

"The poor girl may have been taken unawares," I answered. "She may have been drugged—or stunned——"

"Or she may have gone off of her own accord!" he said grimly.

His suggestion appeared so ridiculous that I did not deem it worthy of an answer, and after that we continued our search in silence. But the farther we penetrated, the more dense the jungle became; the bright sunlight barely managed to trickle through the interlaced mass of twisted lianas over the narrow trail; on each side the foliage formed a dense wall of green. In that leafy labyrinth a week might have been expended in searching one square mile. When at nightfall we made our way back to the deserted village I was not surprized to hear that Kemp and Leslie had the same tale of failure to report.

By this time the distress of the young husband was pitiful to witness. It was in vain that I urged on him the necessity of taking food and rest.

"At least wait till daybreak before setting out again," I almost begged of him. "If we could not find her by daylight, what chance have we of doing so in the dark?"

"Elna—my Elna!" It went to my heart to hear the hopeless anguish in his voice. "Can't you realize that she's somewhere out there—alone—helpless—perhaps a prisoner? God! when I think what might be happening I feel I'm going crazy! I must go to her—save her! Eat?—food would choke me. Sleep?—I feel as if I shall never sleep again. I must rescue her from those devils—I must, I tell you, I must!"

"Very well, then," I answered, rising to my feet and taking up one of the rifles. "Since you are determined to go, I will go with you." As a matter of fact, the boy was in such a state that I dared not leave him to himself.

THE rays of the full moon were struggling through the thick foliage as we plunged almost at random into one of the jungle trails. The night air was laden with the odor of warm, moist earth; the velvety black shadows on each hand were populous with animal life. Vague rustlings and sudden scurryings sounded ever and again from the darkness, and once a sudden loud crashing told of the blundering retreat of some larger animal disturbed by our footsteps. Farther off, the dog-like barking of a herd of zebras drifted to our ears, sinking into sudden stillness as a lion's roar vibrated through the air. Overhead, some night-bird uttered a wail like that of a tortured soul.

Then, without warning, a sound of another kind floated out of the mystery of the African night. Leslie heard it first, and clutched my arm with a grip that made me wince.

"The drums!" There was a fierce, joyous elation in his voice as he repeated the words. "The drums—they will lead us to her!"

Changing direction, we soon had the satisfaction of hearing the low throbbing swell louder, showing that we were heading directly for the spot whence the sound

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"My God!" he exclaimed. "My God! Heads!"

THE long corridor with its banked tiers of barbed cells stretched away before the visitor in a seemingly endless vista. From all parts of the great institution came a medley of sounds —inarticulate babblings, cries, shrieks, snatches of insane song and oratory—the voices of the unfortunate victims of the Great Madness. Thousands were incarcerated in the great asylum. Millions more, all over the world, were raving and cursing in their mad delirium behind the bars in similar prisons. Faint though it was, some hope of cure was held by the authorities, else these inmates would have, as had millions of obviously incurables, been mercifully put to death. A stricken world, after the great Madness of 1997, had been forced to seek salvation in extreme and immediate action. Occasionally, even yet, a modern tumbril would roll silently through the shadowy corridors; a door would clang, and another raving victim would be borne away to the lethal gas chamber, where his hideous cries would be hushed in everlasting sleep.

And now, after two years of heroic struggling, the stout-hearted survivors of the horror had brought a semblance of order out of chaos; had put back on its feet a tottering civilization. But present-day historians, as they sift the facts and chronicle the history of those eventful years, often speculate on the effect a knowledge of the truth would have had on those battling to save the world. For

The INVADING MADNESS

by H. F. Scotter

the truth was, that even as they attained success, the dark forces behind the Madness were preparing, indeed were almost ready, to strike again, and complete their work of mastering the world. With diabolical cunning they had prepared this second attack to follow the first at a time when, the defenders having been deceived into a false security, the complete surprize of it would engender a hopelessness in the hearts of a tired world sufficiently overwhelming to cause immediate and complete surrender. Again would human shrieks mingle with the din of the Horror. Again would human teeth tear bestially at human flesh, and human bodies float hideously in gutters running with human blood.

THE guide, conducting the distinguished visitor through the great prison, spoke respectfully. "You have not visited this floor before, sir?"

"No, this is the first time."

"We have an interesting case in Number 981, sir, not at all like the others. Number 982 also, sir, seems perfectly sane."

The visitor's eyes swung sharply around to his guide's, and lighted up with a fierce interest. "What is this?" he cried; then controlling his obvious excitement, said calmly, "Lead me to them, Williams."

"Yes, sir; this way, sir. Near the end of the corridor, they are."

A half-hundred steps brought them opposite cell No. 970.

"Ah, they already have a visitor, sir." The guide nodded to where a comely young woman stood close to the bars, conversing earnestly with the victim they imprisoned. Near by stood another uniformed attendant, visibly bored by his duties. Williams and his distinguished companion drew back a respectful distance, and waited.

"Doctor," Williams said earnestly, dropping his formal manner of address, "have you learned nothing yet concerning the cause of the Great Mad——"

"Tut, tut, my boy; you know the law forbids its mention."

"To hell with the law!" the young man cried vehemently. "Like ostriches with their heads in the sand they are, those blind fools in authority! And while they impose silence, and throttle publicity, seriously handicapping men like you who are searching for the truth, the Thing may come back and finish the job of wrecking civilization! Oh yes, I know their reason," as the doctor started to interrupt him, "that to call to mind the horrors of those days may send others into insanity. And I know their foolish opinions as to its source. Radio waves from a passing inhabited comet—faugh! It's silly! They were radio waves, all right; but they came from somewhere right here on earth; and if that place is not found——"

"Patience, my boy," the doctor interrupted. "Who knows but that the inmates of cells No. 981 and 982 yonder may furnish the clue for which we have been searching?"

The young guide's ire subsided, and his intelligent features again assumed their habitually calm expression. "Perhaps, Doctor," he agreed, quietly. "They do say that the younger man tells a strange story. In fact, its wildness is what convinced the Insanity Commission of his madness. No. 982 was also involved, but I have never heard the details."

Dr. Artley Ingram, one of the greatest scientists of the age, listened thoughtfully to the young man's words. He had his own theories regarding the Great Madness, but in fear of the results of presenting his apparently insane ideas to the World Insanity Commission, kept discreetly silent. Quietly, however, using his high position as president of the United States Central University to the limit of its obvious advantages, he worked under cover, ceaselessly searching to ferret out the real cause of the terrible catastrophe that had blighted the minds of half the human race.

These were trying days. From chaos to order had been a hard fight. The governments of the world had forgotten old differences and united solidly in the effort to save humanity. A strict censorship and system of espionage had been established. Supreme power had been invested in the suddenly created World Insanity Commission. For fear of the possible contagious effects of such utterances, the authorities continued to place behind bars anyone whose speech hinted even slightly of a hidden trace of the madness. One had to guard his tongue, lest his liberty be revoked. Who was to say whether these drastic measures were wise or unwise? There had been no time for debate. Those whose stronger minds had successfully resisted the Horror now

worked feverishly to bulwark humanity against a possible recurrent wave of insanity. The theory was, that like a pinhole leak in a dike, one insane utterance might release a second flood of lunacy. Humanity in genaral was not interested so much in the source of the madness, now that it had passed, as it was in contagious after-effects.

But there were a few who feared rather a recurrence of the maddening phenomenon than its after-effects. Until its source was found, and assurance given that the phenomenon could not occur again, they would not cease in their efforts to locate and destroy its cause.

Among this small group, Dr. Ingram was probably the most prominent. Had this group been permitted to organize and work in concert, no doubt their findings would have approximated the truth. But the world governments were convinced that the Madness was gone, and would not return until the strange comet regarded as its source would return again on its orbit some hundreds of years hence. Meanwhile, the task of subduing and imprisoning the millions of stricken and insane unfortunates had well-nigh crushed, physically and mentally, the fortunate half of society that had remained sane.

Dr. Ingram believed that somewhere, among the millions of imprisoned insane, there was someone who knew the secret of the phenomenon. Searching, ever searching, he faced a stupendous task in attempting to assort and glean a word or two of useful truth from the insane babblings of the stricken ones. It was during his many visits to the great Central Asylum of the United States that he became acquainted with Williams, whose intelligence and reckless statements of his positive views had elicited the doctor's confidence. To Williams, Dr. Ingram had confided his theories, hopes, and plans, and had thereby gained a valuable assistant; for Williams, through his position as attendant in the great asylum, was qualified to gather information hardly available to the doctor. And now a new spark of hope flamed in the doctor's heart. Perhaps, this time success. . . .

Suddenly the young woman visitor's voice was raised in anger. They looked quickly down the corridor to where she stood close to the bars.

"I will!" she cried. "I'll go to them and force the truth down their throats! To think that you and Father discovered and stopped that awful thing, and now——"

"Nan! Stop!" a voice behind the bars interrupted. "You will only make our chances for release less by thus endangering your own liberty! Have patience, sweetheart, and keep silent. Surely it will not be long before this rigid espionage law is repealed, and the authorities are willing to listen."

Dr. Ingram clutched Williams' arm. Taking advantage of the girl's marked distress, they moved quietly nearer to miss no word of her conversation with the prisoner.

"But Robert," she objected, in a strained but lowered tone, "in the meantime, what of the operator who escaped? He may build another machine, and the world could not stand another hour of the Horror."

"But Nan, even if he escaped the asylum, which is unlikely, it would take a long time to perfect another apparatus. True, the Thangs will bide their time, and attempt it again; but soon, no doubt, we will be released, and find a way to defeat them."

DR. INGRAM waited to hear no more, but stepped boldly to the side of the young woman, who paled at his approach. In a low voice, he instructed

Williams to dismiss the other attendant, who nodded at Williams' whispered words, and, stifling a bored yawn, strolled lazily away. Waiting until he had disappeared through a door at the far end of the corridor, Dr. Ingram then spoke:

"My dear Miss, do not be alarmed because we overheard your conversation; we are your friends." Then after introducing Williams and himself, he went on: "From what I inadvertently heard you say to this young man in the cell, I believe that my search for the secret of the Great Madness may be near an end. Am I right?"

She caught her breath at his bold mention of the forbidden subject. Then the prisoner in the cell answered for her, to prevent her committing herself:

"Yes, you are right, Dr. Ingram. Allow me to introduce ourselves. I am Robert Hargrane, and this"—turning to the next cell, where a white-haired man of about sixty years peered silently through the partitioning bars—"is Professor Answorth, who was my employer before we were imprisoned. He is deaf; a misfortune that was indeed fortunate for the world, as you will see later. The young lady beside you is his daughter, and my fiancée."

The doctor bowed in acknowledgment of the introduction, and said:

"You have information regarding this calamity, the Great Madness, that has overtaken the world?"

Robert Hargrane pressed closer to the bars, and clasped them with strong hands. "Here is a man," the doctor thought as he noted the clear brown eyes, clean features, and magnificent form, "capable of wrestling with the psychical as well as the physical forces of nature." Hargrane, in turn, missed no characteristics of the doctor. The doctor's prominence in scientific circles had made him well known to Hargrane, but for the first time he was looking on the eminent savant's distinguished features. With self-possessed composure he met the firm, searching, yet kindly, gaze of the doctor's steel-gray eyes. He approved of the strong clean-shaven chin, and the mobile mouth that betrayed no cruelty in the man's nature. He was conscious, also, of the lean, slender form of Williams, with his dark, eager, eagle-like features, a young man typical of this flying age when adventurous youth took to the air as though it was youth's natural element. And Nan, his Nan, there beside them, whose troubled blue eyes reflected the mental distress she had been suffering. Even now, had it not been for this scourge of madness that had whipped the world to its knees, she would be his wife. His heart went out with longing and sympathy to her sweet face with its full, half-parted lips. Her slight, athletic form clothed in the neat flying-costume—helmet, jacket, breeches and puttees, youth's sporting-mode of the day—reminded him of some Artemis of the air.

And there was the slight but yet active form of the man in the next cell, whom he loved as a father. The studious blue eyes behind the spectacles were now troubled, as they watched Robert's lips form his answer to the doctor. Robert knew that his frail form would soon break under the strain of imprisonment, and a prayer was in his heart that here, at last, was someone who would listen, believe, and help them. A black menace hung over the world that they alone understood. So he answered:

"Doctor, we have a story to tell that will tax your credulity to the utmost. But if the world is to be saved, you, or someone, must listen—and believe."

"Oh, please, *please,* Doctor," Nan broke in. "You *must* believe it."

The doctor produced notebook and pencil. "I am ready to listen," he said quietly.

"I am sorry, Doctor," Hargrane said, "but it is too complicated to tell here. If you can effect our release, I can take you to where absolute proof will be given you."

"Hm." The doctor thoughtfully stroked his chin. "The task of cutting the tangle of red tape would be insurmountable."

Turning to Williams, he continued, "Would you risk the danger of assisting in their escape?"

"Gladly, Doctor."

"Then let us arrange the details. But first, Mr. Hargrane, I would like to ask you just one question. Just who are the —er, the Thangs?"

Robert Hargrane hesitated, and searched the eyes of Dr. Ingram for signs of insincerity. What he found there satisfied him, and he answered firmly:

"The Thangs, sir, are the malignant inhabitants of another dimension, another plane, very near, and very dangerous to the world."

MIDNIGHT. Now and then the silence brooding over the great darkened asylum was broken by the insane gibberings of some mentally tortured victim confined behind its grim walls, evoking a chorus of nocturnal wailings from others. Gradually the hideous mouthings would subside; then quiet again.

Through the dim light, a lone figure sped down one of the long corridors. The man paused before a barred door; a lock clicked, and he was joined by a shadowy form from within a cell. Another lock grated, and another form emerged. A window at the end of the corridor was softly raised, the loosened bars removed, and the darkness without received the trio in its protecting embrace. In a few moments, in a field close by, a soft purring sound accelerated into a muffled hum, and a dark, bird-like form glided swiftly over the turf, rose into the air, circled, then was lost to sight in the black void above.

DR. INGRAM surveyed with much interest the room into which he had been shown.

"Your father has a wonderfully equipped laboratory here, Miss Answorth."

"Yes, Doctor. He has spent a lifetime, and a fortune, in accumulating the equipment you see," Miss Answorth answered. "And since Mother died, he fitted up living-quarters adjoining. Having the entire top floor to ourselves, and the exclusive use of the roof as a landing-stage, has given us a privacy that he valued highly. Having given up all work of a public nature, and devoting his entire time to private research and experimentation, Father has caused us to be as alone up here as if we were in a desert. Mr. Hargrane, his sole assistant for the past two years, lived with us. We kept two planes; one for myself, and one in which Father and Mr. Hargrane made frequent flights to remote places in the interests of his many experiments. Since Father's and Robert's—Mr. Hargrane's—incarceration, I have continued to live here alone, hoping against hope that their release might be effected. I am so grateful to you, Doctor, for your assistance in their escape. And in a short time you will have revealed to you amazing things that will elevate that favor into an act that may save the world. There," she said, pointing, "is the most wonderful invention in all history—the medium through which those amazing things will be revealed. Its conception and construction were the salvation of the world once, and may be again."

Dr. Ingram looked in the direction in-

dicated, and beheld a complicated apparatus that was mostly concealed by a draped black cover.

"Tell me about it," he said.

"If you will pardon me, I would rather let Father and Robert explain it. They will be here shortly, and do you not think a warm lunch, after their asylum fare, would be welcome?"

"By all means, Miss Answorth." He smiled. "It takes a woman to remember all the little niceties, doesn't it?"

He followed her into the kitchen, and watched her prepare coffee, eggs, bacon, and a salad and dessert for the escaping prisoners whom they expected within the hour.

Dr. Ingram glanced at his watch. "They should be here in fifteen minutes or so," he said. Then a disquieting thought struck him. "Will not the aerial police see the landing-lights, and possibly investigate?"

She smiled.

"Father's genius has taken care of that, Doctor. He has the landing-stage outlined in black-violet signals—his own, and hitherto secret invention, which is an adaptation from the well-known black-light searchlights. A special receiving-apparatus is installed on both our planes, giving them the exclusive ability to receive the signals. To all others in the sky, our roof is as dark as the night itself. Robert can easily show Mr. Williams how to operate it in case Mr. Williams acts as pilot on the return flight. Oh, I do hope nothing goes wrong," she cried, as sudden fright at possible failure startled her.

"Do not worry, Miss Answorth," Dr. Ingram assured her. "Mr. Williams is a very capable young man, trustworthy, as well as an excellent pilot. I see no possibility of failure. It simplified matters a great deal for you to furnish a plane in which he could spirit them away from the asylum. It would be a simple matter for him, an attendant, to enter the place at any time, unlock the cells, and conduct your father and Hargrane to the plane."

She smiled her gratitude for his comforting words. Then——

"Listen!" she exclaimed.

A faint humming sound from above came to their ears, and, at a slight jar overhead, she cried, "Oh, good, they are here!"

In a very few minutes, Nan Answorth, sobbing with joy, was locked in the embraces of her father and lover. Then, with tears in her eyes, she thanked Williams, and led the little party in to the midnight repast.

SEATED at a large table in the laboratory with Professor Answorth, his daughter, and Robert Hargrane, Dr. Ingram and Williams prepared to hear the true story of the Great Madness, and gain understanding of that which was to come.

"Professor Answorth has been deaf and mute for a number of years, Doctor," Hargrane began, "but you shall hear his story in his own words, for he is an expert in lip-reading, and has taught it to Miss Answorth and me, so that communication between him and us would be simplified. He will speak, silently, of course, and I will translate to you his words. After he is through, you may see, if you wish, with your own eyes, the malignant entities or intelligences in their evil dimension."

Hargrane turned to Professor Answorth, who had been watching his lips as he talked. The professor's lips moved as he silently conveyed some comment to his assistant. Facing Dr. Ingram with a dignified bow and quiet smile, his lips again moved, and Hargrane immediately began to speak aloud the words his

mouth was forming—the words that described to Dr. Ingram the most astonishing discovery in history, and the awful danger that menaced the world.

"I wish to thank you, Doctor," he began, "for your timely assistance in our release. Your aid in effecting our escape is, I have every reason to believe, an act that will save the world from a recurrence of the Horror and its resultant collapse of sanity and civilization. Your mind can not conceive now the awful menace that surrounds humanity in the persons of the inhabitants of the fourth dimension. But in a few moments you will be privileged to look, with your own eyes, into that dimension, and behold the malignant beings who plan to invade ours.

"It was not the fault of those evil entities or intelligences, that their first attempt to subdue our three-dimensional plane was a failure. It was due to our timely discovery of them and their diabolical plot, and the bravery of Robert——"

The professor looked at Robert, who blushed with modesty, but continued speaking aloud the words the professor's lips were forming.

"——who took his life in his hands when he smashed the infernal machine that was broadcasting the Madness. It is our greatest worry that the inventor and operator of the machine, the tool of the Thangs, escaped. Even now he may have another almost perfected, almost ready to release another deluge of din through the ether that would be certain, within a few hours, to reduce the rest of humanity to snarling, tearing beasts, or gibbering idiots. You, being on a solitary hunting-trip in the wilds, were mercifully spared the awful spectacle we beheld here in the city at the first invasion of the Madness. Of course the din assailed your ears, as it did those of every human. Your well-balanced mind resisted the Madness, but even you must have succumbed had we not found and destroyed its cause. No doubt you, in your lonely bivouac, at night watched the gorgeous display of the strange comet that then flamed in the sky. I wonder if you too, thrilling to the strange, unearthly music that pervaded the ether preceding the Madness, attributed it, as did other scientists, to the supposed inhabitants of that mysterious celestial visitor.

"Ah, how people here in the city were affected by that music! A fervor approaching fanaticism seized the religiously inclined, who watched the skies eagerly for descending angels from heaven, playing on golden harps! Musicians vainly strove to identify, or classify, instruments the like of which they had never heard! Scientists listened, awed by the music, and by the ingenuity of the supposed inhabitants of the comet, who, so they thought, had accomplished the double miracle of interplanetary communication and the broadcasting of radio waves without other receiving-apparatus than the human ear! All over the world it was heard. All over the world the newspapers were filled with accounts of the phenomenon. And then, when the wonderful music ceased and the awful din of the horror took its place, full realization of its significance came to Robert and me. The mysterious activities of the strange inhabitants of the fourth dimension, into which we had looked through yonder machine, were mysterious no longer.

"I know you are impatient, Doctor, to see for yourself the beings responsible for the Great Madness, so I will not go into a long scientific discussion of the apparatus I invented. There has been a

great deal of theorizing in scientific circles regarding the fourth dimension, and also, apart from that theoretical state, the possibility of life in or on other planes of existence. I believed that the conditions termed planes and dimensions were synonymous. I believed that they were simply states wherein all matter vibrated at a different rate than in ours, rendering it invisible and intangible to our sight and touch. Considering light rays in those other planes as matter, theoretically it should be possible, therefore, to see into those planes, provided that the light rays emanating from objects in those planes could be changed in their vibrations to conform to the rate of vibration of our light rays. The problem was how to do it. An account of the thousands of experiments I failed in would be discouraging reading, but finally it was done. I succeeded in developing a new ray, which, when directed across one's line of vision a certain exact distance from the retina, would change the vibrations of the light rays from the fourth dimension to the point where they would be visible to us."

Professor Answorth's lips ceased moving, and Robert was silent. The professor moved to the shrouded apparatus he had indicated, and removed the cover. Robert followed him, and stood beside the machine, which Dr. Ingram examined with interest. He saw a black box-like affair standing on nickeled tubular legs, with a seat attached at a height sufficient to bring the user's face even with an oval aperture in a rubber curtain stretched over that side of the box. Fixed, one on each side, were two tubes pitched at an angle that would direct the axis of each to a common crossing a few inches in front of the eyes of the user. An adjustable head-rest, with a graduated scale, extended down from the top of the apparatus to govern the distance of the eyes from the crossing of the axes of the tubes, at the open end of which were fastened glass spheres connected by wires to a glittering array of dials and switches on a panel at one side of the machine. The spheres glowed with a peculiar orange light as the professor threw in switches and regulated rheostats on the panel. The whole affair, including a seat for the operator, stood on a circular platform set flush with the floor so that it could be revolved and fixed in any certain position.

ROBERT seated himself before the machine. Turing to Dr. Ingram he said, "I will now demonstrate the using of the machine, Doctor, and see that it is in the proper adjustment for you in case you care to look at the awful entities in the next dimension."

He turned and thrust his face into the aperture in the rubber curtain. Professor Answorth lowered the graduated scale, and carefully scanning it, adjusted the head-rest. Slowly turning a rheostat, he caused the glass spheres to glow brighter and brighter with the orange light until Robert, with his fingers, signaled in old style deaf-mute language to revolve the platform. The professor pressed a button, and it circled slowly a foot or two to the left. At another signal from Robert he released his pressure on the control, and the platform came to rest. After a few moments, Robert withdrew his head from the machine. A grim look was on his features.

"They are there," he said, "and evidently in a state of great agitation. I fear they are nearer ready than I thought for a second attack. Ugh," he shuddered, "I can't get used to looking on their hideousness. Do you care to see them, Doctor?"

This was what he had come for. This

was why he had assisted these men to escape from confinement; to see for himself the strange things in another dimension who, they had asserted, had attempted once, and were preparing even now, to conquer the world through madness. Only a moment Dr. Ingram hesitated, and then, with a queer trembly feeling inside his breast, he sat down before the machine and thrust his face through the opening in the rubber curtain. He felt the head-rest moved against the back of his head, which was gently forced forward into the proper position. All was dark before his eyes at first, then a faint orange glow seemed to spread and slowly absorb the blackness. What monstrous sight was he about to see?

For two minutes he remained quietly seated, while vague shapes writhed and slowly took form before his eyes. Suddenly the group around the machine saw him shudder, saw his body tense and tremble. In a moment he withdrew his blanched face from the machine, and rose drunkenly from the seat. He turned and faced them, his eyes mirroring unspeakable horror.

"My God!" he exclaimed. "My God! Heads! *Heads!* Bloated, leering, bodiless heads! Floating, swaying in a sickening orange atmosphere—peering and mouthing at me with their evil eyes and foul lips!—shrinking and swelling into lopsided, loathsome shapes like the rotting, maggot-quickened boneless heads of corpses! And their thoughts—their obscene, bestial thoughts! Pouring into my brain from their vicious intelligences in a soul-staining, corrupting stream! In heaven's name, Professor, what are they?"

Dr. Ingram sank into a chair, mopping with trembling hand his streaming brow.

The professor's lips moved, and Robert spoke for him:

"Exactly, Doctor; *heads!* The Thangs! Inhabitants of another dimension which, I have every reason to believe, is nothing less than the traditional, orthodox hell that the old-time, Fundamentalist clergy warned us against. It was a blind belief, but apparently true. At least the awful beings you saw are tortured; tortured by an everlasting fire—the consuming flames of unsatisfied passions and desires!"

Robert, with a motioning hand, interrupted the professor. His lips moved in a silent request, and the professor nodded. Robert sat down on the seat of the machine, and turning, requested of Nan that she continue the professor's story for him. "I would like," he added, addressing the doctor, "to be studying the Thangs. I fear the time is limited in which to discover something of their plans."

"Certainly, Robert, go right ahead," the doctor feebly smiled; "I think Miss Answorth will be a very satisfactory substitute interpreter."

Robert nodded his thanks, and turned to the machine, accidentally jostling it with his elbow. Neither he nor the professor seemed to notice this small accident. He thrust his face into the aperture; the professor adjusted the controls and turned on the current. At a signal from Robert that focus and position were satisfactory, he turned from the dials and switches on the panel, and facing the doctor, prepared to resume his story. His lips moved, and Nan's well-bred, sweetly quiet voice continued his amazing revelations.

"Months of study," she began, watching her father's lips, "after the perfection of the machine, and recovery from the shock at the awful beings it revealed, convinced Robert and me that the Thangs, as we soon learned they call themselves, are simply disembodied in-

telligences, evil beyond compare. Several facts became plain. First, they displayed all the characteristics of the human intelligence, without, however, anything at all of the good or pure in their thoughts. Second, we were partly able to read their minds; their wicked thoughts seemed to come to us over the altered light rays that revealed them to us. Third, doing so, we knew they hated us, were jealous of us and planned to invade our dimension. How they intended doing this, and what form that invasion could possibly take, we could not learn. Fourth, we found they were constantly tortured by consuming passions and desires common to us humans, but usually controlled by moral forces and instincts. Having no morality to restrain them, nor a physical body as a vehicle or outlet for those passions, their madness was understandable. Fifth, we concluded that their origin was in our world, our dimension. *They were the souls of dead men and women!* After death, their souls had lacked the buoyancy of good, or morals to raise them to a higher plane of existence; and there, inexorably, they were doomed to stay forever in their hellish sphere. This dovetailed with the orthodox belief in eternal damnation.

"So we gave little thought to the possibility of their success in really invading our dimension, but ascribed their evident but vague plans thereof to merely the wish being father to the thought. We could see no way they could accomplish this unthinkable thing; it simply could not be done. Ah! how much suffering we might have averted; how many minds and lives we might have saved had we but perceived the simple truth!

"For some months before the horror of the madness overwhelmed the earth, we had been paying little attention to the Thangs and their activities. The studying of them was not pleasant, and also seemingly profitless; so we directed our efforts along other lines of scientific research. Our main interest lay in perfecting an apparatus which would indicate, exactly, the location of the source of any known electrical impulse. It was an elaboration and perfection of the old radio direction and distance finder. The task was not so difficult, and after thoroughly testing and proving our theories, we built a finished machine. It was while we were clearing a place for it in a corner filled with old bottles of chemicals, discarded paraphernalia, and so on, that I came across a bottle of solution that I had made several years ago. I had compounded it in experimenting to find a cure for my increasing deafness. How it had frightened me when its application rendered me totally deaf! But its action proved only temporary and harmless. Some unexplainable impulse prevented me throwing it out, and there it had remained, dusty and undisturbed all these years. In the meantime, failing to find a cure, I had become totally deaf and mute, and reconciled to that state.

"As I turned to set the bottle on a table, I noticed Nan and Robert pause in their work and listen with rapt interest to something I, of course, could not hear. And then, trying to read both pairs of lips at once, I was excitedly told of the wonderful music they were hearing—music that seemed to come from nowhere, filling the ether until it seemed to originate in the brain itself.

"We suspended all work as we discussed this phenomenon. Someone had performed a miracle, had accomplished the impossible in transmitting radio waves direct to the ear without the medium of a mechanical receiver! The name of a new hero of science would soon headline the newspapers! We would

write him, whoever he might be, a letter of congratulation when he became known. Meanwhile we attempted to locate him with our new machine, but the hitherto unknown wave-length he used prevented its successful operation without several minor changes.

"Of course you heard, all that night, the next day, and the next night, the strange music that thrilled a mystified world. You know of how it interefered with communication, prevented sleep except among the totally deaf, and almost halted business. The newspapers quoted the baffled radio experts as saying that discovery of the unknown broadcaster was an impossibility; he simply was not on this earth. On the morning of the fatal day of the Horror, the papers published the expressed theories of a group of eminent scientists and astronomers, which were that the strange new comet then streaking across the zenith was inhabited, and that the weird music was radioed by the superior beings thereon. It was not the first time that wise men had been mistaken, as they certainly were.

"That morning, Nan and Robert were standing at the window, watching the excited human stream in the street below. I saw them simultaneously clap their hands to their ears, and quickly turn to me, consternation and horror in their eyes. Breathlessly they told me what had occurred; the music had ceased, and in its place had come the din of the Horror. How terrible it was you already know.

"Their nerves were soon racked and frayed under the strain of the awful noise. Suddenly Nan exclaimed, 'Father, if this does not stop soon, we shall all go mad!'

"Mad!—There was the key to the mysterious activities of the Thangs! Why had I not thought of it before? It was all plain to me now; a clear perception of their plan flashed into my mind. Insanity!—that was it! The deranged human intellect vibrating at a rate out of the normal formed a bridge, a connecting link, and over that bridge would pour the Thangs out of their foul dimension, to take possession of the minds and bodies of humanity, and indulge—if only for a brief time—their bestial passions! They had nothing to lose, and all to gain.

"But how were they producing the phenomenon of the Horror? There was but one logical conclusion: a Thang, possibly the soul of some mad genius of the past, had entered the diseased mind of some once-brilliant modern scientist, and with diabolical cunning the combined intellects had conceived their hellish invention, and had produced a machine to broadcast the exciting music, and then the maddening noise.

"If the world was to be saved, immediate action was necessary. I needed help, but Nan and Robert were fast going to pieces under the strain. Would they soon be raving maniacs, their minds possessed by Thangs? I shuddered at the thought. If only they were deaf too! Then I thought of the drug that had temporarily paralyzed my hearing. Gladly they consented to a drop in each ear. The action was immediate, the relief beyond words.

"Frantically we set to work. After a brief inspection of the Thangs through the machine, which showed them in a state of great excitement, vanishing one by one here and there as they crossed the bridge of insanity to possess the minds of those going mad, we began the necessary changes in our radio-finding apparatus. I breathed a prayer that we fail not to find the source of that nerve-shattering noise. We succeeded, the indicator showing its location in a sheltered cove on the eastern shore of Georgian Bay in Ontario. Of our flight there, and

the subsequent fight with the mad inventor of the horrible machine, and the burning of the ship it was on, I will ask Robert to tell you, as he was the principal actor in that part of the drama."

THE professor's lips ceased to move, and Nan fell silent. He turned to where Robert had remained quietly seated at the machine during his story, and touched him on the arm. He did not move.

Again the professor touched him, took hold of an elbow and gently shook it. Unresponsive, Robert sat lifeless, his face hidden in the machine.

The professor, now thoroughly alarmed, turned his white face to the panel board, and shut off the current. The doctor and Williams were already lifting Robert from the seat, and as Nan caught sight of his set features and staring eyes, she stifled a scream. Pressing her hands to her heart, which seemed to stand still, her mind fought back a single stabbing word: "Dead!"

But no! Supported by the doctor and Williams, Robert walked, as one hypnotized, to a couch, where every effort to revive him failed. For hours the doctor worked over the unconscious man, frankly puzzled by his strange condition. Silently, tensely, the little group watched as he brought into play all his skill and all his knowledge of medicine and hypnosis. Though the rest of his physical organs functioned properly, Robert's mind slept; he remained as though dead.

It was Williams who finally advanced a theory as to his true condition. Doubtfully, hesitantly, conscious of his ignorance in such matters, he said:

"Could he—could the machine have been out of adjustment, and—and drawn his mind into—into that other dimension? I saw him jar it as he sat down."

The professor caught the words on his lips, and a startled look came over his worry-strained features. He pressed Williams' arm in a gesture that spoke plainer than words his thanks for the suggestion, and sprang quickly to examine the machine. Nan followed him, unconsciously speaking aloud in her anxiety as she plied her deaf father with questions. Intent on measuring, calibrating, and calculating, he ignored her. Then with pencil and pad he rapidly covered a half-dozen pages with mathematical equations. Finally turning to his anxious watchers, his lips moved and Nan interpreted:

"Yes, it is possible. I did not foresee it, but it is possible. The axes of the ray tubes which were jarred from their normal forty-five degree pitch, while not affecting the ability of the user to receive on the retina the light rays from the other dimension, set up a rotary motion of the atoms of the rays that acted as a vortex, drawing Robert's intelligence into that abominable plane."

"Father!" Nan cried. "Let me see; set the machine again, Father, and let me see if he is there!"

The professor hurriedly readjusted the machine, and Nan quickly sat down before it, imploring her father to turn on the current. Low moans escaped her as she contemplated the awful, torturing situation in which she would see her lover. Lost? Was he lost to her forever, doomed to stay in that dread place, while his living, yet dead, body remained on earth, a silent, unresponsive reminder of their love?

Her face hidden in the machine, they heard her muffled voice exclaim:

"Robert! Oh, Robert! Yes, he is there, his face white, among their black, loathsome heads! The agony, the pain in his dear features—Robert!—Oh-h-h!"

Her voice tapered off in a grief-filled sob, as they lifted her from the seat and

carried her, half fainting, to her room. Dr. Ingram administered restoratives, and soon she became quieter.

The men gathered around the unconscious Robert to discuss the situation, and find a way, if possible, to reclaim his intelligence from the evil domain of the Thangs.

The professor, with pitiable eyes, watched the doctor's lips as he talked, soothing, encouraging, and suggesting. "Professor," he said, "if a condition can be produced in the rays that would create a vortex drawing one's intelligence into that other dimension, why can not the angles of the ray tubes be reversed so that the vortical action will also be reversed, drawing from the other dimension into this?"

"We can try it; I will reset the machine accordingly," the professor wrote the words rapidly on a pad. He turned, and hastened to the machine.

Nan re-entered the room, her face tear-stained but composed, and the doctor explained the experiment they were about to attempt.

"We will place his body again before the machine just as it was," the doctor explained, "and trust in God that he will be restored to us."

"It must not fail!" Nan said, with grim determination in her eyes; "and if soul can call to soul, if the human will has any power, if love can triumph over evil, then he shall return to us, for I shall stand behind him, and call to him with all my soul, all my will, all my love!"

The doctor bowed, as if in homage to this display of powerful and sacred emotion, and at a nod from the professor that he was ready, prepared with the assistance of Williams to lead the unconscious Robert to the machine.

Dawn had come long since, and now the sun was staring through the window at the drawn faces of the little group of haggard actors in the strange drama. Far below them, in the canyon of the street, the city had come to life and its human swarm hummed in a myriad tones in the beginning of the day's activities, all unconscious of the fact that, even then, their fate, and the fate of like swarms the world over, lay squarely and solely in the hands of five people in a room high above their heads.

DR. INGRAM placed his hands under Robert's shoulders and raised him to a sitting posture. With Williams opposite, they prepared to lift the staring man, and guide him to the seat before the machine. They had him half-way to his feet, when——

Cra-a-a-a-a-a-sh!

One long, continuous, endless detonation of sound burst on their hearing! Hands pressed tightly to ears failed to shut out the stream of hammering noise that beat on the brain like the stream from a fire-hose. They looked at each other in horror. The Madness had come again! The Madness! *The Horror!* God!

After the first crashing shock, their senses could detect and separate tones and notes of the roaring cataract of hideous, discordant clamor. An intermingling of vibrations ran the scale from vanishing-point below to that above. The tintinnabulation of unmusical gongs strove for recognition with the shrieks, wails, hoots and thuds of every noise device conceivable! The throb of drums, the beeps and klaxonings of signal horns, the clatter and clap of thunderous armament threaded with shrill screaming as from souls in torment. The clang and peal of crashing bells; the clank and rattle of dragging chains; the moaning lament of deep-throated whistles; the trumpeting and howling of wild beasts; static

cracklings; cries, groans, explosions; a confusion of incoherent babble — all commingling in a heterogeneous bedlam of noise that beat and tortured the auditory nerve until the mind reeled!

The professor, though he was immune, knew instantly from the look of horror on the others' faces what had happened. Running, he procured the bottle of precious drug, and in a few moments all had been relieved from the nerve-shaking effect of the awful din.

For the time being, they must forget Robert. The authorities, police officials, public officials, all who could be reached must be saved. There must be vials found and charged with a few drops of the drug. They must be wrapped in cotton, labeled, and dropped from their plane on the landing-stages of the police station, the city hall, the military barracks, and the government buildings. They must sacrifice their immediate personal interests for the benefit of society; for they knew not how soon the source of the Horror could be discovered and destroyed. The attempt to restore Robert must wait.

Calm now, in the face of disaster, they all set feverishly to work. Nan typed dozens of slips bearing the words:

A DROP IN EACH EAR FOR THE HORROR
A DROP IN EACH EAR FOR THE HORROR
A DROP IN EACH EAR FOR THE HORROR

Faces lit by the weird orange glow from the spheres on the machine which the professor had prepared for the restoring of Robert and had not bothered to turn off, they madly filled, wrapped and labeled the vials, counting on the desperation of the finders to follow the directions. Soon they were through; the drug was all used. Nan volunteered to distribute them, and rushed to the roof, a basket filled with the mind-saving vials on her arm. In a few minutes her plane was dipping and soaring over the heads of a crazed populace battling futilely the maddening stream of reason-wrecking noise.

Back in the laboratory, the professor worked over the radio-detecting apparatus. Something was wrong; it would not operate. He needed Robert's help, but Robert—where was he? His body sat stonily on the couch, but his mind was in that evil domain whence was pouring the loathsome stream of damnable entities that were even now taking possession of the minds of men and engaging in a wild orgy of debauchery with their bodies.

Williams was assisting the professor as best he could, but the doctor, unable to help with the apparatus, stood at the window, fascinated by the scene in the street below.

People were rushing here and there, throwing arms wildly about, praying, shouting, rapidly succumbing to this second attack of the Madness. Try as they had, they had not forgotten; the awfulness of the former attack came clearly to their minds, and thus weakened resistance to the Horror. Hopelessness seized them; there was no comet now to blame for the din. What could save the world? God had deserted it, and hell had taken charge!

Hundreds took the easiest way out, preferring death to madness. Dr. Ingram saw their bodies hurtling to the pavement from windows of offices above. Individual acts of hideousness caught his attention as the holocaust of insanity consumed human reason. A woman with a baby clasped to her breast had been kneeling in the gutter, her face upturned in fervent supplication. Suddenly she sprang up, caught the infant by the feet and dashed out its brains against a pole! A surface car, the motorman leaning from the window as he gesticulated and grimaced in maniacal glee, careened at

high speed down the street to crash into the rear of another. Bloodstained, mutilated passengers crawled from the wreck, and ignoring hideous wounds, fought or danced or committed acts of indecency as the Thangs that possessed their brains directed!

Fire broke out in a dozen places; automobiles ran recklessly, over people, down the sidewalk, through plate-glass windows, until their mad rush was stopped by some immovable object. A group of men and women, their arms about one another's half-naked bodies, emerged from a doorway, and milling about, dancing in a dervish frenzy, swept screaming down the street to be blotted out by a huge passenger plane that crashed, flaming, from the sky!

A world gone mad! Civilization tottering! Humanity destroying itself in an awful whirlpool of insanity! That was what Dr. Ingram was witnessing. Scenes past description; debauchery and obscenity unspeakable; murder and rapine; an inferno of human passions rampant on the face of the world! A hideous delirium in which the black entities from hell took possession of man's mind! God! And this was occurring in every city, in every country on the face of a once fair globe!

Sickened, he turned from the window to where the professor and Williams sweated over the radio-detector. They had certain changes almost complete, the professor had discovered the strange new wave length the Thangs were using, and the machine would be ready soon.

THE doctor nervously paced the floor, pausing now and then to feel Robert's pulse, whose cataleptic state remained unchanged. Irresistibly he was drawn again and again to the window. There was a little less confusion, now. The street was filled with dead and wreckage; there were fewer to indulge in the wild orgy of madness, but the scene was yet terrible beyond words. Continuous fighting and self-destruction was constantly swelling the crimson flood in the gutters, choked with torn and naked bodies.

Suddenly his heart leaped with hope. Down the street came an orderly body of police, their calm and sure actions as they commenced the work of overpowering the insane betokening Nan's success in placing the vials of the drug where it was needed. A body of soldiers swung around another corner, adopting drastic measures in an attempt to save this little spot of civilization; dispatching the badly wounded, and executing the hopelessly mad. Perhaps there was hope; perhaps, in places, there were strong-minded, strong-willed men and women still resisting the maddening din. Now if they could locate and destroy the demon in human form, and his hellish machine——

At that moment, Nan returned. White-faced, she crossed the room as in a daze, and collapsed across the kneees of her lover, who sat as they had left him, staring—staring—at nothing. Dr. Ingram approached to offer encouraging words, but with face hidden against Robert's hands she shook her head and waved him away. He honored her desire to be alone; for the present her work was done.

The doctor turned to where the professor and Williams still labored at the device to which they pinned their hopes of saving a disintegrating society. He saw the professor straighten his bent old form, a look of triumph in his eyes. He turned and motioned excitedly to the doctor, who sprang to his side. Williams was gazing, fascinated at the wonder of the professor's accomplishment, at a glass sphere. Inside it, suspended on a thin wire, was a needle that wavered, hesitated, then pointed straight down! The

professor wrote rapidly on a pad, and the doctor read the startling words:

"That 'devil machine' is in the basement of this very building!"

Dr. Ingram showed the pad to Nan, who nodded disinterestedly, and again bowed her head on Robert's knee in silent grief.

Quickly, the three men prepared to invade the basement, to search for the room in which was hidden the maniac with his inconceivable device that continued to send out through the ether the hideous, maddening cyclone of clamor. Here, no doubt, he had built a duplicate machine along with the first one that had so nearly wrecked the world. With insane cunning, the tool of the Thangs had prepared the second attack against the possible failure of the first, and had boldly located his diabolical instrument close to where he could the sooner enjoy the fruits of their mad plan. To say that he would defend it with all the maniacal fury of a leader of his foul brood would be putting it mildly indeed. They were entering on a dangerous mission!

The professor produced strange-looking automatic pistols—terrible weapons, children of his prolific inventive mind—and they descended the stairs. Adequately armed though they were, none of them was of the fighting type, and two were old, well past the age when man's heart thrills to the excitement of combat.

But bravely they traversed the deserted corridors and crept down the silent steps. The elevators had ceased running hours ago, the operators flinging themselves into that maelstrom of madness in the streets. Deserted, open offices spoke mutely of the tragedy that had engulfed their occupants. But here and there, through an open door, they caught a glimpse of a still figure sprawled at a desk or on the floor, clutching in a stiffening hand the grim weapon that had meant a way out.

The basement reached, they cautiously explored its silent corridors. Here was the power room; here lockers, storage rooms filled with discarded shelving, store fixtures and so on; here a shop for the maintenance of the machinery in the big building. Through it all they searched, fruitlessly, fingers clenched around ready weapons. They found no sign of the hidden source of the Horror until before them yawned the darkened steps to the sub-basement.

Below, in the gloom, each thought they caught a glimpse of a dim skulking form, but a beam from a flashlight in the hand of Williams revealed nothing. Was it imagination? Slowly descending the steps, the silent trio—Williams first, then the doctor and professor—continued the search. Nothing save some silent machinery, piles of piping, and cobwebbed abutments met their eyes. Advancing farther into the yawning darkness, the ray of light fell suddenly on the outlines of a door set in the concrete wall at the rear. Williams signaled for silence, and extinguished the light. Then through the blackness gleamed a yellow streak from under the door. Each instinctively knew they were near the end of their search, and caught their breaths at the dangerous task before them.

Slowly, silently, they crept closer to the closed door. Surely, behind it must lie that which they must risk their lives to destroy, for all other possibilities had been exhausted, and each had supreme faith in the accuracy of the professor's device which had indicated this basement as the source of the nerve-shattering noise.

Williams, cautiously advancing in the darkness, with the doctor and professor close behind, felt his outstretched fingers come in contact with the concrete

wall. The faint yellow light from under the door guided him to it, and kneeling, he peered through the keyhole. He saw a limited section of a well-lighted room, but within range of his vision was enough paraphernalia of an electrical nature to convince him that he was at the door to the den of the maniac—the mad, Thang-possessed inventor of the device that was wrecking the world!

Cautiously, he tried the knob. The door was unlocked, and snapping on the flashlight for a second, he signaled with a nod that they could enter. Gathering all the nerve at his command, Williams flung open the door, and the three, with hearts thumping, but with weapons held desperately ready, sprang into the room.

Nothing happened; no one was in sight.

FOR a moment they stood quietly waiting for their eyes to become accustomed to the light, and then they wonderingly surveyed the room. So large an array of glittering apparatus was before them, that its separate parts did not immediately register on their senses. Three features, however, caught and held their attention. There was the ceiling, from which was hung on insulated supports a huge network of wires that was unquestionably an aerial for the broadcasting of wireless signals. There in a corner was a large switchboard, with its shining rows of switches and meters and rheostats. Above the rubber mat that covered the floor before the switchboard, hanging at a height slightly above their heads, was a bank of huge coils, joined at the bottom by a thick steel plate. And there, to one side, was the monstrous, madly working device that, plainly, was the object of their search.

But where was the mad creator and operator of this collection of electrical and mechanical monstrosities? Again they carefully scanned the room. As crowded as it was, they could see no place where one could hide. Ah, no doubt the madman was out in the streets, bloodthirstily taking part in the hideous orgy that a maddened world had been plunged into, crazed by the awful clamorous racket that his machine was even now automatically hurling through the ether.

Turing to the devil-device, they were fascinated by the whirling, whirring, vibrating activity of the thing. At one side was an electric motor, direct-connected to it by a spinning shaft that disappeared into its interior. This gave life to the dozens of mechanisms mounted in and on the vast framework, which seemed like a huge hive alive with myriads of mechanical bees. Around the whole, a circle of microphones received and distributed the hellish noise.

For a few moments, the three who had come to destroy it gazed in awe at the marvelous device. There were huge knobbed arms that beat with monotonous regularity on drumheads of all sizes. Other arms clanged frantically against a row of discordant gongs. Pieces of polished metal rose and fell and clanked together. Great bows seesawed back and forth across resined strings. Horns of every conceivable type hung here and there, and steadily squawked or shrieked in a hideous chorus. Flashing bits of metal or wood rotated or vibrated as each contributed its part to the revolting holocaust of sound. They were devoutly thankful for the drug in their ears that rendered them deaf to it. But now it must be stopped; where was the control for that spinning motor that ran the awful thing? Ah, there on the switchboard was a three-pole switch, larger than all the rest. It must control the whole board, and to pull it would stop——

All three sprang forward at the common thought. Williams was first; the

others were close beside him. His hand stretched out to seize the handle.

Clang!

Some invisible force jerked upward the hands that held their weapons, the steel guns were pulled from their fingers and clashed against the bar fastened to the huge coils overhead, where they stuck, immovable!

Disarmed by an electro-magnet!

Astounded, they half turned and caught sight of a grotesque figure against the wall, at one side of the door they had entered. His left hand was still on the switch with which he had sent the current through the magnet that had disarmed them. His right held an automatic pistol that unwaveringly covered them. Trapped!

Wild eyes mocked them with an insane glare, and then from a mouth that drooled bloody foam came peal after peal of maniacal laughter, though mercifully, in their deafness, they could not hear it. Blood showed on the maniac's flesh through the rents in his muddy clothes. Matted hair hung over his glittering eyes and added to his loathsome appearance. Not for an instant did those eyes leave them, as he stooped and picked from the floor a long sharp knife still dripping red from his participation in the terrible orgy in the streets. He came slowly toward them, the bloodlust in his eyes, and laughing with unholy glee at the terror he inspired.

Lost! Each gave thought to the dire word, but each was thinking most of the fact that they had failed, and that failure meant the loss of a world! Paralyzed with horror at the thought, they waited while the maniac crept nearer, and yet nearer. But, with insane cunning, he did not come too close, but paused some fifteen feet away. At this, the hope that had begun to mount in Williams' breast ebbed entirely away; he had been planning a sudden rush in which he would have a bare chance, should the Thang-possessed madman come close enough. Now, however, all three would fall under his bullets before Williams could take a single step.

Hopelessly, helplessly, they watched him, as a bird watches, charmed, the swaying evil head of a reptile. Motioning with gun and knife, he herded them away from the switchboard to the back of the room, where he lined them up with their backs to the door. To what tortures was he about to put their helpless bodies? God! Let him kill them and get it over with; all hope was gone, the world was lost; what mattered their lives now?

The professor suffered mental tortures beyond the others. He was thinking of Nan, up there in the laboratory with the living husk of her beloved Robert. Soon the effect of the drug would wear off, and she would be a victim to the maddening din of the Horror! And Robert's soul, doomed to eternal torment in the dimension of the Thangs! A picture of their separate fates rose before his eyes; Robert's agonized face floating among the loathsome heads of the Thangs in that hellish orange atmosphere—forever! And Nan, his little Nan, running, wild, half-naked and insane, screaming, through blood-filled streets! No! *No!* It must not be! Yes—he'd try it—God grant him strength to get to that switch before the maniac's knife or bullets stopped him!—Now! *Now!*

The professor, sobbing, shaking in the desperation of his wild resolve, wheeled, and staggered toward the switchboard, hand outstretched! The black form of the madman darted between him and his goal, and with knife redly gleaming, drew it back to thrust its crimson length into his body! The leering face was close to his own, and the drooling mouth breathed its fetid breath into his nostrils,

as the red blade began its forward, upward sweep! And then——

Flash!

Something—some invisible force—tore the crimson knife from the madman's hand, and sent it spinning against the wall, where it clattered to the floor, bits of reddened flesh clinging to its hilt! Another flash! And the gun flew through the air, and fell to the floor beside the knife! The maniac stumbled backward, threw behind him two bloody hands in a protective gesture, and grasped the bare blades of two shining switches on the board! His teeth, exposed by curling lips, clamped shut; the red pupils of his eyes disappeared upward behind black brows, and left the whites dully gleaming through the strings of his matted hair. His body grew instantly rigid, and curling tentacles of smoke spiraled upward from his burning flesh. Stiff, black, smoking, a charred demon from hell, he hung grotesquely there, a crucified sacrifice to his own mad genius. The tool of the Thangs was dead!

The professor sank, fainting, to the floor. Williams and the doctor had turned, startled and astonished, when the professor had bolted from their side in his desperate attempt; but the action was so quick, events moved so rapidly, that it was several seconds before they raised their eyes, and beheld framed in the door the stalwart form of Robert Hargrane! A pistol, a thin thread of pale smoke curling up from its muzzle, was in his hand. And behind him, peering over his shoulder were the frightened eyes of Nan Answorth!

Robert Hargrane! Eyes no longer staring, staring at nothing. Mind no longer held in tortured thrall in the hideous domain of the Thangs; but here, with his own kind again, in time to save them, and save the mind of the world! He strode forward and raised his hand to the rubber handle of the shining switch. As he jerked it open, they saw his body sharply outlined against the blue flame of its arc; and beside him, the thing that was the maniac sank, smoking, to the floor, staring with dead eyes at its whirling, whirring, mind-destroying creation while it slowed, and stopped. The Horror was ended.

BACK in the professor's laboratory, the four men gazed wonderingly at Nan. The effects of the drug were diminishing, and it was good to hear again.

"I could not wait," Nan was sobbing, with joy, "and while you were gone I got Robert to the machine. You had turned it on, Father, and after I succeeded in getting him on the seat, and his face through the curtain, I just stood behind him and prayed, and called, and called. And he came back to me."

THE Reconstruction was urgent, but must wait; the sane of the world, worn out by the physical and mental torture, just now must sleep. Strength must be stored up for the stupendous task that faced them. And so, seeking places of protection against the maddened ones who still roamed the streets, they sought strength and temporary forgetfulness in restful oblivion.

Two persons, however, were awake. Nan and Robert sat close together on the couch in her father's laboratory. Tomorrow they would do their part, but now they had no thought but for each other. While his hand lightly caressed her soft hair, she whispered:

"Was it as terrible as your poor face indicated, dear, there with—with those terrible Thangs?"

And as Robert turned her lips up to his, he breathed:

"Not much worse than it would be here without you, sweetheart."

FUNGI · from · YUGGOTH

By H.P. LOVECRAFT

1. THE COURTYARD

It was the city I had known before;
  The ancient, leprous town where mongrel throngs
  Chant to strange gods, and beat unhallowed gongs
In crypts beneath foul alleys near the shore.
  The rotting, fish-eyed houses leered at me
From where they leaned, drunk and half-animate,
As edging through the filth I passed the gate
  To the black courtyard where the man would be.

The dark walls closed me in, and loud I cursed
  That ever I had come to such a den,
When suddenly a score of windows burst
  Into wild light, and swarmed with dancing men:
Mad, soundless revels of the dragging dead—
And not a corpse had either hands or head!

2. STAR-WINDS

It is a certain hour of twilight glooms,
  Mostly in autumn, when the star-wind pours
  Down hilltop streets, deserted out-of-doors,
But showing early lamplight from snug rooms.
  The dead leaves rush in strange, fantastic twists,
And chimney-smoke whirls round with alien grace,
Heeding geometries of outer space,
  While Fomalhaut peers in through southward mists.

This is the hour when moonstruck poets know
  What fungi sprout in Yuggoth, and what scents
  And tints of flowers fill Nithon's continents,
Such as in no poor earthly garden blow.
  Yet for each dream these winds to us convey,
  A dozen more of ours they sweep away!

ANOTHER DRACULA?

by RALPHE MILNE FARLEY

"A huge bat clung to the horse's neck, sucking its life-blood."

1. The Mysterious Coffin

"I WONDER who's dead?" inquired Dan Callahan, driver of Yankton's sole taxicab, pointing at a long wooden box with brass handles, which lay on a baggage-truck on the station platform.

"Search me!" replied the station agent, without interest. "Look at the tag, if you're that curious."

But Dan quite evidently wasn't that curious, for he slouched into a chair beside the one in which the agent sat, against the only cool wall of the freight house. It was late afternoon—or, rather, early evening—of an unusually hot June day. There never was very much doing in Yankton, Pennsylvania, and less than usual this particular afternoon.

The taxi-driver took a crumpled pack-

age from one of his blouse pockets, fished out a crushed cigarette, replaced the package, tapped the cigarette on his chair, put the cigarette in his mouth, took off his cap, ran his finger around in the sweatband, found a match there, replaced the cap, and lit up. The station agent was already smoking a pipe. The two sat and puffed in silence, watching the coffin; not that they expected it to do anything worth watching for, but merely that it happened to be directly in the line of their vision, and hence was as easy to focus on as anything else.

The shadow of the freight house gradually lengthened in front of them, and objects in the distance took on a reddish tinge. The definiteness of the shadow became blurred, the red tinge faded out, and blue twilight began to fall. A faint warm breeze crept down the tracks. Bats fluttered in and out under the canopy of the station platform, in pursuit of flies and midges.

A clatter and a roar and a swirl of cinders, as an east-bound train swept by; then silence again, the oppressive silence of a warm summer evening. Heat-lightning played over the hills in the distance.

Dan Callahan, the taxi-driver, untilted his chair, arose slowly, and stretched his arms.

"No passengers tonight," said he, "so I guess I'll be going home to Maggie and the kids."

"Say, will you look at that!" interrupted the railroad man. "One of them bats is trying to get into the coffin."

Dan looked, and made the sign of the cross. Clinging to the edge of the box, close to the lock, was a small brown bat, fluttering as though with suppressed excitement. As the two men stared, another bat joined the first.

"They give me the creeps," asserted the agent, as, rising from his chair and shuddering, he switched on the platform lights.

"Hasn't it turned a bit cold?" asked Dan, shuddering too.

The squeak of automobile brakes was heard, and then a third figure rounded the corner of the freight house. The newcomer was a young man still in his twenties; erect, well dressed, with straight pointed nose, firm jaw, and pleasing smile.

"Hello, Doc," Dan greeted him eagerly. "How's my little boy?"

"I've just come from your house," replied the doctor. "You'll be glad to know that the little fellow is much better. Responding to treatment beautifully. I believe that I may safely say that he is out of danger."

"Doctor Crane," said Callahan fervently, "you're a wizard and a brick. I thought sure I was going to lose little Dan. You've saved his life, and if there is anything that I can ever do for you this side of hell, just ask me. That's all, sir."

"It's nothing—nothing," replied Crane deprecatingly; "merely my professional duty. And a great pleasure, I assure you. Such a manly little fellow."

"Say, Doc," interrupted the station agent, "will you look at them birds trying to get into that there coffin?"

"Well, well, so they are," replied Dr. Crane, jovially. "I wonder what's attracting them."

"And here comes the great granddaddy of them all," added the agent, as a grayish bat of fully two-foot wing-spread swooped down out of the gathering dusk, hooked its wings onto the edge of the box, and snapped viciously at the two little brown bats already there. They fled squeaking, but still fluttered around in the vicinity.

"Hm," remarked the doctor, professionally.

"Must be one of these there umpire

bats I've heard tell about," suggested the station agent.

Dr. Crane strode over to the box, and brushed the huge creature aside with one hand. The bat snapped at him, and then shambled to one end of the top of the box, where it crouched menacingly. The doctor stooped and sniffed at the crack.

"Hm," he ruminated. "Peculiar smell, very, but not at all what I expected. No wonder it attracts these little creatures. As public health officer, I must get it to the undertaker's at once. Who does it belong to?"

"Dunno, Doc," replied the agent. "Look at the tag."

By the light of the platform-lamps, Crane read aloud, " 'Mr. Peter Larousse, Yankton, Pa.' Who is he, I wonder? There's no one of that name lives here."

"I am he," said a quiet voice behind them.

NONE of them had heard any-one approach. They turned, and saw that a fourth man had silently joined them. He was tall, well over six feet in height. Dressed entirely in black, with a short black Inverness cape across his shoulders, fastened at the neck by a single clasp of gold with jet stones. In his right hand he held a black stiff hat, rather narrowed at the top of the crown.

He was old, of an indefinable age, yet erect, and exuding power and vigor. Clean-shaved, he was, except for a drooping white mustache. His face was aquiline, with high-bridged thin nose and peculiarly arched nostrils. He had a lofty domed forehead, crowned with white hair, profuse except around the temples, where it was scanty. His eyebrows were iron-gray and massive, almost meeting over the nose, and composed of profuse bushy hairs. The mouth, so far as it showed under the heavy mustache, was fixed and rather cruel-looking, with peculiarly sharp white teeth. These protruded over the lips, whose remarkable ruddiness showed astonishing vitality for a man of his evident years. His ears were pale, and at the tops extremely pointed; the chin was broad and strong, and the cheeks firm though thin. The general effect was one of extraordinary pallor.

His hands, at first glance, seemed white and fine, but closer scrutiny disclosed them to be rather coarse—broad, with squat fingers. In fact, most of the features of his anatomy, although appearing delicate and refined at first, nevertheless suffered by prolonged examination.

His general appearance, however, was courtly, aristocratic, and foreign in the extreme.

But the most noticeable single item about him was his eyes: small, gimlet-boring and bloodshot without being in the least bleary. The three men who had preceded him on the station platform laid the redness of his eyes to the setting sun; but the sun had long since set, and the platform was now illumined by its electric lights.

"*I* am Peter Larousse," he repeated, ignoring the rudeness of their stares. "Did I hear some one mention my name?"

"Pardon us, sir," replied the doctor. "You startled us. I am Doctor Crane, the village health officer."

Crane advanced, extending his right hand, but the stranger did not grasp it. Instead, he swung his hat across his breast, and made a courtly bow.

"You will excuse me, I am sure," said he, "for not shaking hands, as I have an unexplainable aversion to personal contacts. Well, you called for Monsieur Larousse, and here I am. What do you wish of me?"

"Is that your coffin?" asked the doctor abruptly, becoming a bit nettled.

The stranger frowned, then smiled quizzically.

"Yes and no," he answered. "If you mean am I inside it, the answer is no. But if you mean is it consigned to me, the answer is yes. I am not dead—yet."

He bowed again.

"Well, it will have to get to the undertaker's at once," asserted Crane. "It's a menace to the health of the community."

"In what way, may I ask?" inquired Monsieur Larousse, serenely.

"It is already attracting vermin," replied the doctor.

The large gray bat was no longer to be seen, but the two little brown bats had returned and were clawing at the lid.

"Ah, the darlings!" exclaimed the stranger, gloatingly.

Striding over to the coffin, he shifted his pointed hat to his left hand, and scratched first one of the little creatures, and then the other, on the head.

"See," he said turning, "they like me. They know a friend. I love all animals, and all animals love me. I have a way with them. But now to get down to business. You wish this coffin removed, doctor? So do I. What is the next step?"

"This is Mr. Daniel Callahan, of the Commonwealth Garage," introduced the doctor. "He can get his motor-truck at once. The undertaker, being an undertaker, can be found at any hour. This other gentleman is Mr. Bill Jones, the station agent, who can release the shipment. And I am the health officer, as I have already stated."

"Ah, what a fortuitous conjunction of personages!" murmured Monsieur Larousse. "The arrangements sound excellent."

While Dan departed for his truck, and the agent unlocked the freight house and turned on the lights inside, Dr. Crane asked, "And what are your plans for the body?—that is, I assume the coffin contains a body."

Ignoring the implied question, the stranger answered, "It is, of course, to be buried—in your local cemetery, to be explicit. What formalities are necessary?"

"You will have to have a cemetery lot."

"I have such a lot."

"And a permit from the village clerk."

"I should like to see him at once, then."

"He will be in his office tomorrow morning."

"He shall have to see me this evening," asserted the foreigner imperiously. "I suffer from a disease known as *dermatitis exfoliativa tropica.* You, as a physician, will realize that that means I must avoid the daylight as much as possible. Can not the clerk, for a fee, be induced to transact official business in the evening?"

"I am sure he can," agreed the doctor smiling, "when I tell him about your disease. Would you mind my offering you my professional services? The exact sort of dermatitis which you mention is a rare disease, at least among white people; and I have never had the privilege of treating, or even observing, a case."

"Then I refuse to be experimented upon," replied the stranger, drawing himself up haughtily.

Just then Dan Callahan returned with his truck, and the four men put the box aboard. The box was unusually heavy, which rendered all the more noticeable the effortless ease with which the stranger handled his quarter of the load.

"Gosh!" exclaimed the agent, wiping his forehead. "It must weigh a ton."

"Ah, my friends," explained the

stranger, "there is a lead lining inside."

"Then how the devil did the smell get out?" blurted Dan.

The stranger glared at him, and said nothing.

"Will you ride with me?" invited Dr. Crane.

"Thank you, no," replied Larousse with a slight inclination of his head. "The night is beautiful. I will walk—Oh, just a moment. One more question. Need the coffin be opened by any one?"

"Not if you have the death certificate with you."

"I have the certificate."

So the truck and the doctor's car drove away up the street toward the center of the village. The station agent re-entered his office to put out the lights. And a large gray bat hovered around the coffin in the departing express-truck.

THE center of the village, a typical one-street Pennsylvania valley-town, was a bustle of early summer evening activity. Stores alight for the evening trade. Music issuing from the open doors of the movie-house. Couples strolling back and forth. Groups chatting at the street corners.

The gray bat did not follow the coffin into the bright lights of Yankton's gay white way.

Dr. Crane and Dan Callahan found the undertaker's wife at home, and she sent one of the children out to locate her husband. When he finally arrived, the three men tried to move the coffin, and were having a terrible time at the task when a calm voice near them said, "Permit me to assist."

It was the tall stranger again. With his help, they moved the box with surprizing ease.

Next Dr. Crane and Monsieur Larousse hunted up the village clerk, got him down to his office, and secured the necessary burial permit.

When this formality was over, "Where are you staying?" the doctor asked.

The stranger drew himself up.

"That, my dear sir," said he frigidly, "concerns no one but myself."

The young doctor hastened to apologize.

"I only thought we might need to locate you, sir, if there should be any hitch in the proceedings," said he.

"There will be no 'hitch,' as you call it," replied Larousse, frigidly. "I have made all the necessary arrangements with the undertaker, and he assures me that there can be no unexpected complications. I shall remain in this beautiful little town for a considerable while. You will find me every evening somewhere along this street."

And bowing ceremoniously, he stalked off.

"After all that I've done for him," said Crane to himself, "he might have been a little more polite. A queer, queer man. My, what a spooky evening!"

The big gray bat swooped by, in spite of the bright lights, startling the doctor out of his revery.

2. *Introducing Mr. Fulton*

A BIT later in the evening, the tall stranger entered Morton's General Store and made a few purchases. The news of the arrival of this mysterious foreigner had spread up and down the street, and now a crowd gathered to get a good look at him.

In paying for his purchases, he lingered quite a while at the cashier's desk. Who wouldn't linger for a chat with Mary Morton? She was by far the most radiant creature and wholly desirable bit

of femininity that the little village of Yankton had ever produced.

A brief description of the town will not be amiss. Yankton, Pennsylvania, boasts one thousand odd inhabitants. They are quite odd, and Yankton does not boast them very loudly.

It is a typical old-time New England village. This may seem to be a strange statement to make about a Pennsylvania community, but New England itself is now overrun by practically every nationality of Europe. The people of old English stock there have lost their control of everything, except some of the financial centers of State Street, and the social centers of Back Bay. In fact, they have been forced to recognize the Irish, most of whom came over in the 1840's to build the railroads, as allies of theirs against the later comers, whom they regard as non-American.

But years ago, in Revolutionary times, the mountains of Pennsylvania and Ohio were settled by New Englanders of the original stock. Here you will find the purest forms of New England Colonial architecture. Here the Yankee blood has remained practically uncontaminated, right down to the present day.

But they had inbred and degenerated, for all of that. Individuals of marked mentality had moved away. The result was that the inhabitants of Yankton, although superficially prosperous, well-dressed and modern, were mentally and morally in the same class with the superstitious illiterate mountaineers of other states and other parts of Pennsylvania itself. All that kept them from hex-murders and witchcraft-trials was a wholesome fear of ridicule; for they were just educated enough to know that such things are frowned upon in more cosmopolitan communities. In fact, it should be remembered that the New England forebears of these Yankton folk had had their own period of hysteria over witchcraft.

Mary Morton represented the flower of the pure old English stock. She had reverted to type, after generations of decline. She was the aspiration of all the young men of Yankton, and so she had been able to pick for herself the catch of the town, Herman Fulton.

Herman had had his eye on the main chance all his life. At an early age he had gone to work in the Yankton Bank, scorning a college career, or even the completion of high school. There were no college men in Yankton, except the two doctors. Not that Yankton men did not ever go to college, but merely that those who went to college never returned to Yankton; they went on to wider fields, where they made their long-slumbering heredity tell. Yankton could name with pride many of these distinguished sons of hers, men of national repute, who had turned their backs on their boyhood home.

But Herman Fulton had been different. He had stuck to the bank, had spent next to nothing, and had invested and reinvested his earnings to advantage. At the age of thirty-five, still a bachelor, he had worked up to the position of assistant cashier. Not that this indicated that Herman was possessed of any particular degree of intelligence. In fact, it is probable that he was subnormal mentally. Even morons are often fiendishly clever along some one line, and Herman possessed a well-developed money sense, if no other. True, he was self-educated and was an avid reader of books on all subjects, but it is to be doubted if he really understood very much of what he read, although he passed for quite a learned man in Yankton.

When the cashier had conveniently died, soon after Herman's attaining the position of assistant, Herman had de-

manded his place—and had been refused. At the next annual meeting he had calmly ousted the surprized board of directors, who did not realize that certain controlling blocks of stock, standing nominally in the names of old Dr. Porter and others, were really Herman's; had substituted a board of his own henchmen, and had elected himself not cashier but president!

After that, whenever Herman Fulton "requested" anything in Yankton, the request was usually granted, even if the granter couldn't quite figure out just what Herman intended to do if the request were refused. Herman was conscienceless and ruthless. Thus he speedily became the financial power of Yankton.

So all the girls, who for years had been setting their caps for him, had been intensely jealous when Mary Morton's parents had announced her engagement to Herman.

And then Dr. Ralph Crane, fresh from Harvard Medical College, had come to town, just about a year before this story begins. He had picked out Yankton as a likely place to build up a country practise, and had been welcomed by old Dr. Porter, who had more patients than he could handle at his advanced age.

Unfortunately, young Crane had fallen in love with the beautiful Mary, and it was evident that she liked him very much. In fact, if he had arrived on the scene before her engagement to Herman Fulton, there can be little doubt that the dashing young doctor would have speedily won her heart. But, in primitive communities such as Yankton, engagements are regarded as being almost as sacred as marriages. In fact, they are usually lived up to a lot better. Engaged girls don't even dance with, or receive calls from, young men other than their fiancés. So Ralph Crane had had to content himself with worshipping from a distance, and with such professional contacts as occasional illnesses in Mary's family gave him. Mary herself was always the picture of health.

Entering the Morton Emporium on the evening in question, Dr. Crane observed with displeasure the quite evident regard which the courtly European was displaying for Mary, and the flattered interest which she returned. He would speak to Herman Fulton about it!

But, on second thought, he decided *not* to speak to Herman after all. If this old beau could make a dent in Herman's hold on Mary, so much the better. It was something that he, Crane, would have liked to do himself, if he had not been deterred both by respect for the local conventions and by fear of Herman's power.

At that, however, there was something about the performance which jarred on the young doctor's sensibilities, in spite of all his pleasurable anticipations of his rival's discomfiture. It may have been the May and December aspect of the situation. Or it may have been something else, some mere instinctive feeling. Perhaps the uncanny events, which had accompanied Monsieur Larousse's arrival, contributed to Dr. Crane's uneasiness.

Had Monsieur Larousse really "arrived"? This seems a strange question, in view of the fact that here he was. And yet, in the course of the evening, gossip developed the fact that he had not been seen to alight from any of the trains which had stopped at Yankton that day, nor had he got off the Lancaster bus, nor had he come in his own auto. Yet here he was, so he must have arrived—somehow.

The tall old gentleman lingered in the Morton store until closing time. Mostly he wandered up and down the aisles. Occasionally he would make small pur-

chases. Whenever opportunity offered, he would chat with Mary. His attitude toward her was courtly and unexceptionable.

Morton's had many customers that evening, but Monsieur Larousse did not seem to notice that he was the center of attraction, the cause of unwonted crowds in the usually sparsely patronized store.

When Pop Morton finally put up the shutters, no one happened to notice where the stranger went. He did not register at the Republican House, nor did he put in an appearance all the next day.

Around noon, Dr. Crane ran across Dan Callahan on the street. Dan was in his cab, the doctor on foot.

"Hop in," shouted Dan, drawing up by the curb, "and I'll take you wherever you're going—free. I've something to tell you."

"Not that Junior is worse, I hope?" said the young doctor, as he got in.

"Heavens, no," replied the taxi-driver. "Junior couldn't get worse with you tending him, Doc. No, it's about the old bird whose coffin we moved yesterday."

"Not ill, is he?" asked Crane, professionally interested, and a bit hopefully.

"Not as I know of," replied Dan, "for he ain't been seen since the stores closed last night. No, it's about his coffin. They buried it this morning, without any service, and in the *Wilson* lot!"

"Well?"

"You know old 'Aunt Hattie', the witch who lives in that little cottage just beyond the cemetery? Lives all alone except for one big black tom-cat?"

"Yes."

"Well, she's a Wilson. And it's her who owns the Wilson lot."

"Hm," ruminated the young doctor. "Bats, and coffins, and black cats, and witches, and burial without church rites. It does sound a bit spooky, doesn't it?"

"It sure does, Doc!" agreed Dan, solemnly.

But neither of them could advance any theory as to where Larousse spent his nights.

3. *Eavesdropping*

THAT evening, as soon as the sun had set and the bats were out, out came the elderly stranger as well. For some time he walked the streets, furnishing the subject of conversation for whispering groups. Then, as before, he entered Morton's store, and resumed his attentions to Mary.

His attitude was courteous and respectful. Not a word, not an action, nor even a glance, that any one could take exception to. He evidently had traveled extensively, and he talked interestingly of all the countries of the world.

To Mary Morton, cooped up all her life in this little one-horse Pennsylvania mountain town, and—since her engagement to Herman Fulton—deprived of all other male attention, this elderly stranger was a diversion, in fact almost a godsend.

Herman usually spent his evenings in his office in the bank; but tonight, due to several anonymous phone-calls in several female voices, he abruptly left the bank, dragged his fiancée out from under the very nose of the elderly stranger, and huffily took her to the movies, thus depriving her father of his cashier for the rest of the evening.

Peter Larousse promptly faded from the scene. His chauffeur had arrived in town with an expensive foreign car, and this evening drove him out into the country. The chauffeur had registered at the Republican House, and the car was kept in the hotel garage. But Larousse himself did not put up at the Republican House. His own lodging-place still remained a secret.

The next morning, as Dr. Crane dropped into the Morton store to make some sort of a purchase—a collar, perhaps—he overheard heated words coming from Pop Morton's private office in the rear. The young doctor wasn't a gossip or an eavesdropper, and accordingly would have scorned to listen in, had he not overheard the mention of Mary Morton's name. His secret infatuation for the beautiful girl now proved too much for him, and so he at once developed an unexplainable interest in some kitchen cutlery, displayed on a counter along the opaque-glass partition which shielded the proprietor's sanctum.

"Am I, or am I not, engaged to your daughter?" came from the other side of the wall in the unmistakable tones of Herman Fulton.

"Of course you are—of course you are," replied Pop Morton soothingly.

"Well, then," continued the young banker, "haven't I a right to object to my fiancée compromising herself with that fish-eyed old French lizard?"

"But she ain't compromising herself," objected Pop. "That fish-eyed old French lizard, as you call him, has been perfectly polite and respectful to her. Besides, he buys lots of things at my store; and lots of people come in here every evening to take a look at him. He draws more crowds here than any advertising display I've put on in years. And if Mary draws *him,* what harm's done, at least as long as he behaves himself?"

"It's got to stop! I demand it!"

"But why? Why stop me making money? Is that a sensible way to treat your future pa-in-law?"

"The future wife of Herman Fulton has got to be discreet. If she can't be discreet, I'll break off the engagement."

"Now, Herman," remonstrated Morton, "I'd hate to think you cared as little for Mary as all that. You wouldn't do anything like that, I'm sure."

"Well, perhaps not," admitted the banker, rather sheepishly. Then taking a new tack, "But do I, or do I not, hold a mortgage on your store?"

"Sh! Sh! For heaven's sake, Herman, don't be so loud about it. I don't want that mortgage broadcast all over the county."

"Why not? It's on record with the prothonotary up at the county seat, isn't it?"

The storekeeper ignored this question, and countered with: "See here, Herman, you leave this Mooseer Larousse alone for a few weeks, and I'll be making enough off of him to pay up your d——d old mortgage."

"Now, Pop, is that a nice way to speak of your mortgage, when I was so kind as to help you out and lend you all that money when you had to have it or go under? And it isn't a question of paying off the mortgage 'in a few weeks'; it's a question of paying off that mortgage *right now!* It's already overdue, and I demand payment. My engagement to your daughter stands, but it's the mortgage against Monsieur Larousse. Mary must stop acting as your cashier until that spooky old devil stops hanging around your store."

"Why do you call him a spooky old devil?" asked Pop Morton artlessly, seeking to divert Fulton from his line of attack.

"Because he *is* one!" replied the latter, momentarily diverted. "He comes here with a coffin, and all kinds of strange bats and things. Nobody knows who he is, or how he got here, or where he came from. He never shows up, except at night. He keeps under cover in the daytime, and nobody knows where or why."

Dr. Crane, listening outside, chuckled softly to himself. "I know *why,* even if

I don't know *where*. It's that confounded skin disease he told me about."

Meanwhile Herman Fulton was continuing, on the other side of the thin partition, "And he buried his coffin in the Wilson lot, which belongs to that old black-cat witch, Aunt Hattie. He *looks* spooky, too. He looks like—why, do you know what he looks like? It's only just occurred to me. I've been reading a book I got out of the public library, called *Dracula*, by a man named Bram Stoker. All about a he-vampire, who was dead and buried, and yet came out of his coffin every night, and sucked people's blood, until *they* died and became vampires, too. This Dracula could turn himself into a bat, or a wolf, or a shower of moonbeams, in order to get at his victims. I'll bet this old bird is Count Dracula himself, or at least another vampire of exactly the same sort. He looks just like the way Dracula was described in that story."

"Ha, ha, ha!" exclaimed Pop Morton, with forced levity. "Well, that's a good one. Ha, ha, ha! A *he*-vampire, eh? Why, I thought vampires were only *shes*. That's the way they always are in the movies. And they don't bite folks neither. Ha, ha, ha! A *he*-vampire! Well, that's a good one."

"Don't laugh, Pop. I'm serious about this. I really am. This is quite a different kind of vampire. It would make your blood run cold to read that story. That man, Larousse, is a positive menace to this community!"

"Now, Herman," remonstrated Morton in surprize. "You don't mean to tell me that *you* take any stock in such a cock-and-bull yarn as that?"

"Yes, I do, Pop. That story is supposed to be based on mediæval European traditions. These blood-sucking vampires were well known in the old days. I've looked up about them in the encyclopedia, too. Seriously, I believe the man's a menace. He ought to be run out of town."

And then Pop Morton committed the tactical mistake of saying, "But what's to prevent my making a little money off him, first?" thereby bringing the conversation back to the argument from which he had just succeeded in distracting Herman's attention.

He bit his lip, but it was too late to recall the words.

"*What's* to prevent?" snorted the banker. "*I'm* to prevent. You take Mary right out of your store and keep her out, or——"

"But it'll cost too much to hire another girl to do her work!" interposed Pop wofully. "Entirely apart from the money I lose by losing this he-vampire's trade, you want me to lay out extra money hiring a substitute for my own daughter, who don't cost me nothing."

"Do you talk of *money* at a time like this, with your own daughter's health, happiness, life, and even soul at stake? Pop, I'm ashamed of you! But I'll tell you what I'll do: *I'll* pay the wages of the substitute, and not put it on the mortgage either. Actually pay it out of my own pocket. And then we needn't tell Mary any of the reasons for what we're doing. No need to hurt her feelings by letting on to her what it's all about. We can tell her that I'm doing it as a special present to her, and because I object to the future Mrs. Fulton occupying a menial position, even in her own father's store. *My* wife must be free of all degrading toil."

"But think of all the trade I'll be losing," Morton objected feebly.

"Trade be d——d!" snapped Herman. "Think of you daughter—and your mortgage," he added.

The two men emerged, and Dr. Crane hurried away from the cutlery counter.

As he left, he heard Pop Morton whisper, "Do you suppose he heard us?"

"Don't care if he did," replied Herman Fulton, but not in a whisper. "He's only a sawbones."

That night there was a new young lady at the cashier's window of the Morton Emporium. But when Pop put up the shutters and went home at nine o'clock, he found Peter Larousse seated on the front piazza in earnest conversation with the beautiful Mary.

4. *Werewolves and Such*

So it became evident that merely relieving Mary Morton of her job as cashier of her father's store had not been enough to put a stop to the objectionable attentions of the weird old foreigner, who, Herman Fulton insisted from the depths of his reading, must be the original vampire Count Dracula, or at least his double.

Deprived of the opportunity of chatting with Mary at the cashier's wicket, Monsieur Larousse called on her at her home.

Her father felt that, of course, he ought to report the matter at once to her fiancé. But he kept putting this off, due partly to a general irresolution of character, partly to fear of facing Herman Fulton, and partly—it must be confessed—to a sort of satisfaction that he felt in the coming-to-naught of all the trouble that Herman had caused him.

As a result, it was several days before Herman discovered how the land lay. Mary could not be blamed, for no one had ever warned her against the old Frenchman. So for several evenings in succession, Peter Larousse called on her, and was welcomed. As she had been accustomed to spending her evenings at the store, time now hung heavy on her hands. Her fiancé was busy down at the bank, making money, and so she welcomed the visits of the distinguished foreigner.

Although his personality was rather chilling and revolting, yet he did bring to her the fresh outlook of the outside world. He talked entertainingly of the far countries which he had visited. All peoples and all times seemed familiar to him. And Mary rapidly began to realize what a limited, narrowing and cooped-up sort of a place Yankton was, after all!

But one night Herman called to take her to the movies, and found Peter Larousse already there.

Herman was chilled with horror at first. And then he boiled internally at the thought that all the good money he had spent in hiring Mary's substitute down at the store had been utterly wasted, for it had given "old Dracula" an opportunity to see her even more intimately at home. Herman would have liked to make a scene then and there. In fact, he nearly did. But his long banking career had schooled him to the realization that making oneself ridiculous has a bad effect on business. And business was always uppermost in Herman Fulton's considerations. So, although with difficulty, he steeled himself to be courteous to the older man, and politely begged him to excuse Mary for a prearranged date.

The stranger, with equal courtesy, submitted. But his eyes sized up the young banker appraisingly.

The deferred "scene" took place in the Morton parlor later that evening, on the return from the show. Herman stormed, and Mary wept and had to be comforted. But finally, because she really did care for her fiancé, in spite of his peculiarities and his domineering manner, she agreed that she would always be "out" thereafter, whenever Larousse called.

Larousse called regularly every night

for a week, and at last gave it up. Like the drunken man who was thrown out of a party three times in succession, he knew when he wasn't wanted.

From then on, he walked the streets rather aimlessly after nightfall. Sometimes he would drop into a picture show, or would sit in the lobby of the Republican House, or even would make assorted purchases at the Morton Emporium. But by now he had become a familiar figure to the people of Yankton, and he no longer excited their attention. To no one, except Herman Fulton, old Dr. Porter, and young Dr. Crane, was he any longer of any moment. The interest of the two doctors was purely professional, although he would not let either of them treat his strange ailment. Herman kept his weird theories to himself, for fear of ridicule, but he read everything that he could find on the subject of vampires, even sending to Philadelphia for books, when he had exhausted the bibliography of the Yankton Carnegie Library.

And anyhow, so far as known, Larousse hadn't yet bitten any one in Yankton. But he was never seen to eat any regular food.

EVEN if the mystery of the mysterious stranger hadn't grown stale, there now were other matters to distract the attention of the citizens of Yankton. It was an unusually dry summer, and the drought afforded an absorbing topic of conversation.

In addition to the loss of crops and the threat against the town's water-supply, there began to be a large and unexplainable loss of chickens. Traps were set every evening, and were found sprung every morning, and still the toll of fowls continued. Several people reported having seen a lone wolf in the mountains back of the town.

Peter Larousse dropped gradually out of sight. He seldom appeared downtown in the evening any more, but no one took particular note of this defection, so intent had they all become on the lone wolf, and the depredation of the chickens, which two phenomena were now quite generally linked together in people's minds.

More people saw the wolf. Several poultry-raisers sat up in ambush and got shots at him, but he seemed to bear a charmed life, and to be immune to their bullets.

Eventually a huge German police-dog was found dead in the hills; and from that time on, the wolf was not seen again, and no more chickens were stolen; but no one could persuade the people of Yankton that these events had anything to do with each other. They knew perfectly well, these Pennsylvania mountaineers, that the wolf had merely transferred his predatory operations elsewhere. Couldn't they tell a wolf from a dog?

As for Herman Fulton, he had his own theories on the subject, but he kept them to himself.

About the time of the end of the wolf episode, Mary Morton was taken ill, and called in Dr. Crane. The young doctor didn't mind this at all, until the case began to get serious. Then he became frankly puzzled with the situation.

In spite of a good appetite and the consumption of plenty of food, Mary began to lose weight and grew pale and wan. Tonics were administered, but they seemed to be only temporarily stimulating. Finally blood-transfusions were resorted to, and these soon had to become more and more frequent. It was evident that Mary was losing blood steadily and rapidly, and yet there was no apparent cause for this loss.

Peter Larousse reappeared in his old haunts. His health seemed to have been

greatly improved by the bracing air of the Pennsylvania mountains.

5. *Dr. Crane's Adventure*

FINALLY the young doctor prescribed a change of scene for his patient. He recommended that she be sent to the seashore, and that specialists be called in. But her fiancé, although most solicitous, had a narrow provincial clinging to his native town.

"There is no spot in the world more healthful than the Pennsylvania mountains," he insisted. "Now that the wolf-scare is all over, let's put her in my cabin in the hills back of the town. I'll have the place all tidied up, and will hire Mr. and Mrs. Foss to take care of it. Pay for the whole performance myself, too. Mrs. Foss used to be a trained nurse before she married Josh Foss, so we'll be killing two birds with one stone."

Dr. Crane reluctantly had to acquiesce. Herman Fulton was not only boss of the town; he was boss of Mary Morton, too.

Mary seemed to improve slightly under the change, and Ralph Crane soon found that the remote location of the camp gave him an opportunity to spend an undue amount of time with his patient, without attracting attention or exciting any gossip.

Then Mary began to fail again. She became paler and paler, and more and more bloodless.

Her fiancé, in accordance with his theories, made her a present of a beautiful chased gold crucifix, inlaid with (what he said were) diamonds, which he begged her to wear all the time in memory of him. He hung the cabin with bunches of garlic; but as Mary happened peculiarly to be rather partial to their acrid odor, she did not mind, especially as she thought that he knew of this strange liking of hers, and was doing it on that account.

He puttied up all the window-cracks with what appeared to be bread-crumbs, and did not mention the fact that he had procured this material at the Catholic church down the valley. Mary and he were good Methodists.

Dr. Crane ascribed this puttying to the old New England superstition as to the baneful effect of night air. He remonstrated roundly on general sanitary considerations, but finally gave in when the nights turned suddenly colder with approaching autumn, especially as the cabin leaked air like a sieve, anyhow.

Ralph Crane spent long hours nearly every evening with Mary, except on the occasions when Herman Fulton was there. As a result, Ralph and Mary became very good friends. For the most part they talked of their pasts, than which there is no better way of getting well acquainted. The girl recounted all the personal details of her rather uneventful Yankton girlhood. The young doctor told of his city childhood, his boyhood on a New Hampshire farm, and his struggles to put himself through Phillips Exeter Academy, Dartmouth College, and Harvard Medical School.

Herman Fulton didn't seem to mind this intimacy. In fact a sick, weak, bloodless and somewhat petulant Mary rather bored him, in spite of his regard and concern for her; and so he was glad to have some one else—provided no scandal was involved—take off his hands the task of keeping her amused.

One evening when the doctor and the girl were sitting alone together in front of the cabin, the full moon and a soft whispering mountain breeze were most suggestive of the appropriateness of ghost stories; so Crane embarked on an apt tale of his New Hampshire boyhood.

"The farm on which I worked," said he, "was about two miles from the lake

from which we got our water supply. There was a hot-air pump down by the shore of the lake, which pumped the water up to a tank beside the barn. That sort of pump is a very simple affair: a little fire-box, holding only a shovelful or two of coal, and then a single air-cylinder and piston about a foot in diameter on top of that, and then on top of the cylinder a heavy three foot flywheel. This was the engine layout. I don't remember how the pump itself was hitched up—all we had to bother with was the engine. If that went, then the pump went too. You don't see many of that kind of pump nowadays."

"I never heard of one," the girl said.

Dr. Crane continued, "It would run all night on one loading of coal; that is, unless it happened to stop. When it stopped, you could tell up at the farmhouse, because the 'thump, thump, thump' in the pipes wouldn't sound any more. Then whichever of the farmhands' turn it was, would have to light up a lantern, trudge two miles through the woods down to the lake, climb up on the big flywheel, hang on to one side of it to give it a spin, and thus start the pump pumping again. Well, this particular summer, we were troubled with mountain lions."

"Real lions?" interrupted Mary.

"Not the kind you see in circuses," explained Ralph. "The kind that we had up in New Hampshire looked about like a lioness, only somewhat smaller and slimmer. Both sexes look alike. The male hasn't any mane. Sometimes they call this creature a mountain lion, or a catamount, cougar, panther, painter, puma, or what have you? Well, anyhow, two of them came down out of the north woods up by Mount Chocorua, and started stealing chickens, much like this wolf they had around here last month. Only these beasts occasionally took sheep, and calves, too. A boy friend of mine, Tolly Piper, was driving the cows home from pasture one day, when one of these lions jumped out of the bushes, picked up a calf right under Tolly's nose, and jumped back into the bushes again with it."

"Horrible!" murmured the girl.

The young doctor warmed to his story, and went on. "One day one of them walked right into an afternoon tea of summer folks. It calmly surveyed the scene, while all the people sat frozen to stone. Then it slipped quietly back into the woods again. And at night you could hear them calling to each other from one range of hills to another. A most weird sound!"

"Did you ever see either of them?" asked the girl.

"Saw both of them," was the reply. "One night around midnight I was lying awake in my second-story room in the farmhouse, listening to the howls, when I noticed that the voices of the two lions came nearer and nearer together, until finally they met in the woods just between the farm and the lake. Then the sounds got louder and louder. We had some tame foxes in a wire-netting cage just back of the house, and I could hear our poor little pets whimpering with fright. Then there came an unusually fierce scream from one of the lions, followed by a crash against the wires of the cage. Then another scream and another crash, as the other beast sprang. This was repeated several times, but after a time the two animals gave it up, and came toward the house. I could see them distinctly in the moonlight, which was as bright as it is tonight. They would walk a few steps, and then sit on their haunches, throw back their heads, and howl. One time

(Continued on page 424)

The House of the Golden Eyes

by THEDA KENYON

"There was something bloated, parboiled to a dull red, sliding toward him."

IF TIM GALLAGHER had not spent twenty-four of his twenty-eight years in America, three thousand miles from the land of his birth, he would have missed the adventure that greeted him almost as soon as he set foot again in County Cork; for the wisdom of his native land would have warned him that the odds were against even his six feet of young strength. But American public school and college and associates had practically obliterated his atavistic "superstition," and so it was that he spent half a night following the dancing lure of light that kept always just out of reach—careless alike of the fact that it was May Eve, and that better men than he had lost in their pitiful conflict with the will-o'-the-wisp.

In fact, Irish though he was, he did not realize that it *was* the will-o'-the-wisp that he followed; he knew only that here was something puzzling, intriguing, which challenged his imagination and determination; and so he went after it, striding on firm ground, crashing into briers, sloshing dangerously through a swamp. And always, definite yet elusive, barely an arm's length away, yet as free of his grasp as the stars, the witch-light dulled his apprehension, until, suddenly conscious of a barrier other than rocks or trees, he tore his gaze from that flickering invitation and found himself confronted with a building.

It was one of those peasant-cabins familiar to every tourist, but in the darkness it seemed to have a significance out

of all proportion to its size—a significance enhanced by the mere fact of its existence in so desolate and lonely a place.

Tentatively, Tim started around it, ready to spring back or forward at the slightest warning, yet unaware of what he feared; and moving in this way, he felt a slight but unmistakable shock on finding his path barred by a great, flowering shrub, which seemed to throw a peculiar unreal glamor over everything.

Tim had never before seen red hawthorn in bloom; he could not really be said to see it now, but in the darkness, he felt it—all its compelling, supernatural beauty acting almost like a drug to his tired body and nerves.

For a long minute, he stood sensing it, struggling to recall the forgotten lore of his homeland. Hawthorn — it meant something—it had some strange association, deep-rooted in his race. . . .

He shrugged, abandoning the effort, and was about to knock, to ask his way back to the town he had left, when a slight rustle caused him to turn sharply. Luckily, as he did so, his shoulder touched the cottage door, and it gave. The next instant he was inside, his back against its rotting panels; the sweat pouring over his livid face at the recollection of the two oblique yellow eyes that had flared out of the darkness, hardly a yard away.

What had he seen? What manner of beast was it that crept out of the night, invisible even in shadowy outline, except for those terrible eyes? Was it a beast at all? Was it anything—except his imagination?

His mouth twisted in a bad attempt at a smile. Imagination! Where would he get an imagination to conjure up even an hallucination as infinitely evil as those eyes?

There was something there—outside —waiting for him. Or was it waiting? Would it wait?

Wait? Naturally. What else could it do? He was here, sheltered, safe. Here he would stay, until dawn. For some reason, he felt that the thing, whatever it was, would be powerless in broad sunlight. He would wait, then. It was ridiculous to yield to the prickle at his spine, the weak chattering of his teeth. With an almost heroic effort, he controlled them — and as if in deliberate mockery, a cascade of ghastly, demoniac laughter seemed to fall from the rafters, just above his head.

At the same second, directly in front of him, less than ten feet away, the dread golden ellipses flared—and faded.

At that, sheer, absolute terror owned him—terror in which was no element of common sense or reason. He lurched forward, stubbed his toe, and caught up the small stool in his path, instinct making him grab it automatically, as a weapon.

His quick motion had an unexpected result; it fanned into momentary life a fragment of peat, and the glow gave him a swift knowledge of the hut's interior: it was about eight feet square, with a central hearth, and one window. The realization of that window restored his courage. Through it, he had seen those terrible eyes—they were not visible through a wall, nor had their owner entered the hut in some uncanny way; and the knowledge served to revive his reason.

He was moving slowly now, sliding along the wall. If he could reach the window, reconnoiter without being seen or sensed by the thing outside, he might be able to settle the mystery. After all, many animals had eyes luminous at night; it might be that it was only his fatigue

that gave these such a sinister atmosphere.

A faint draft warned him that the window was less than a foot away; and its freshness made him abruptly aware of the fetid odor of the cottage. From the moment of his entry he had been vaguely conscious of it, even through the nerve-racking events of the past few minutes; but now it nauseated him, and he closed his eyes, drawing deep breaths of the night air.

Fortunately, it refreshed him, for raising his lids, he found himself staring into those golden eyes, and knew that they were steadily approaching. Gathering himself together, his left hand took quick measurement of the window, while his right raised the stool. But he never threw it, for without sound or warning, the space between him and those eyes melted; something slashed his face from the corner of his brow to his mouth, barely missing his eye; and he found himself hung half over the sill grappling with an unknown antagonist which seemed to fight him as impersonally and effortlessly as a spirit.

But it was not a spirit; twice his hand closed on thick, short fur, beneath which he sensed delicate bones. The second time, he wrenched violently at what seemed to be the creature's foreleg, and only the repeated slash of pain—this time across his grasping hand — saved the bones in his grip from being snapped. In the second his grasp relaxed, his antagonist jerked back, and in that instant's respite he realized the terrible danger of grappling with this unknown thing, particularly with his own strength and technique so seriously impaired by the wall between them. Undoubtedly the part of wisdom was to sit, back to the door, stool in hand, keeping a dark vigil until dawn; and he had almost decided to do this, when the terrible golden eyes were again directed toward him, and he realized that they must be barely outside the window, or actually within the room. There was only one thing to do. Raising the stool, he beat straight at them, and though the blow was broken by the wood splintering against the window-frame, he knew that it had to some extent struck home, for a scream more terrible than any sound he had ever heard filled the night with awful vibrations. It was neither human nor animal; every tree and stone in the desolate place seemed to echo it; the house itself quivered with it.

Abruptly, he felt that the conflict was over, that he was alone; yet he had none of the exhilaration of the victor. He was dizzy, nauseated, oppressed by the darkness, the lack of air, the stench in the cottage. The gash in his face had begun to throb, and putting up his hand, he discovered it was deeper than he had realized. Somewhere, there must be water in the cottage; gathering his spent strength, he began a blind hunt for it. Twice, he bumped into the wall; once, into a rickety table. Except for that, and a bundle that might be rags serving for a bed, the place seemed empty.

At last, he discovered a series of rough board shelves, but his quick hope that there might be a water-jug on them was vain. The lowest was crowded with bottles—small, queerly shaped phials, for the most part; toward the back, two or three of decanter size cheated him afresh, by proving to be filled with noxious, strange liquids. The second shelf held books, and his hand on their covers disturbed thick dust—or the brown, musty powder into which ancient calf bindings degenerate. The third held a few broken pieces of crockery, and what felt like pewter utensils.

The fourth seemed at first empty. On

a level just above his head, his exploring hand ran half its length without encountering anything. Then, quite without warning, he touched the shelf's sole occupant. It was warm, alive. He was aware of a muted thrum and rustle just above his head, and jumped back at the instant that the cottage was filled again with ghastly, inhuman laughter.

His heel caught in the bundled rags; he stumbled, fell backward, lay still, aware of two things: the filthy odor which permeated the place was like a drug, stifling him; and there was something hovering just above him. He could not see it, but he knew it was there; he almost fancied he could feel a faint breath—yet it was too quick, too pulsing for breathing. With a great effort he raised his hand to his face—apparently nothing was above him; yet, in that last instant of consciousness, he knew that it was something living suspended in the air, not a foot away.

WHEN he opened his eyes, the sun was streaming into the hut, and—except for the dull pain of his face and hand—the whole ghastly night might have been a dream. There was nothing whatever sinister about the little room; it was precisely what he had at first thought it—a typical peasant's home. It was not even as dirty as most of them were. Then he remembered, and sniffed apprehensively, and discovered a faint, unmistakable trace of the odor that had practically anesthetized him the night before.

What could it have been? He raised himself half on his elbow and stared about. There was no trace of food or drink—nothing that could have so filled the room with disgust. His gaze reached the hearth, rediscovered the dead peat ashes. Swung above them was a great iron pot. It must be in that; the place was apparently abandoned, and its former owner might have left food in it. In that case, the fire lit by some chance wanderer the night before might very well have liberated the fetidness.

He was on the point of rousing himself and investigating, when he heard someone singing. The voice was a woman's, peculiarly sweet, and with just that undercurrent of wildness appropriate to her surroundings. He lay back again on the bundle of rags which had served him for a bed, and listened, comfortably aware that she was approaching, and that many of his problems would be solved by her presence. Undoubtedly she would get him water and food, and once he had had them, and relaxed long enough to regain some of his lost nervous energy, he could follow her directions back to town.

She was near enough now for him to hear the rustle of the shrubbery which she brushed in passing. Another minute, and her song had stopped on a peculiarly haunting minor note; and glancing up, he saw her in the doorway.

He was impressed at first with her slender straightness; it hardly seemed that her feet touched the ground, and the slight wind stirring her full skirt added to the atmosphere of lightness about her. In her hand she held a branch of the hawthorn. The sun struck through its translucent blossoms, and turned her tousled red hair to a living flame, giving her delicate silhouette peculiar life. He watched her for a long minute, in sheer pleasure at the dark, lithe outline, with its relief of fragile red flowers, and then realized that she was not alone. On her shoulder perched a great black bird.

He said, "Come in, won't you?"

She did not answer, and he felt that she was smiling with a sort of amused contempt; but she did as he asked, and

he noticed as she moved that her walk justified his first impression of her lightness. She seemed almost to float as she crossed to him. There was only one blemish to her perfect grace—her left arm hung limp at her side, as if a blow had paralyzed or injured it.

When she was quite near him, she turned a little; and now, for the first time, he saw her face.

Just why he should have felt that slight, subconscious shock he could not have said. It was undoubtedly the perfect face for such a figure — the face which he should have expected. Long, with slightly pointed chin, it had all the fragile beauty he could have desired for it. The slightly peaked brows were like an etching on the white skin, and the amber eyes beneath them were the natural accompaniment for burnished red hair. There was only one thing to mar the first impression of perfect beauty. The girl had apparently been eating berries, and a tiny red stain at the corner of her full lips threw the mouth out of symmetry.

As she paused beside him, the great bird on her shoulder teetered forward, and seemed to peer into his face with sinister curiosity. He saw her lips move, and though he heard nothing, the bird flapped its wings, and with a peculiarly ungraceful motion rose from her shoulder and sagged through the air to the shelf. He realized suddenly that this had been the thing he had touched in the dark, the thing he had sensed hovering above him as he sank into his coma.

He said sharply, "Do you live here?"

For a second, he thought a queer light moved behind the girl's eyes, but when she answered him, her voice had all the sweetness that had filled her singing.

"Yes. How did you come here?"

"I lost my way."

"How long have you been here?"

"Since an hour or so after dark."

He felt that she was about to say something, then, but though her eyes returned to him three or four times, and her lips half parted, she did not speak. Finally, he broke the silence.

"I am very thirsty. Can you get me some water?"

Her brows drew together. "Water?"

"Yes, of course. I told you I am thirsty, and I haven't washed since sundown. Besides—my face——"

He moved slightly, so that his slashed cheek was suddenly out of the shadow, and toward her; and at sight of it, she started back, a combination of horror and sorrow contorting her face. A queer little sound broke from her—something between a cry and a moan; and at the same instant the terrible laughter which had twice before frozen him, filled the cottage.

"Good God—what is——"

"Nothing!" She leaned toward him, panting a little. "Only my bird. He has a split palate—it is nothing to fear——"

Her voice faded, and in spite of her words of reassurance, he was swept by sudden, inexplicable dread. There was something too intent, almost fascinated, in her gaze. Fixed on his wound, it seemed to sear it like a flame.

He raised himself on his elbow, and that threw his face into shadow again, and once her gaze was broken, she drew a long, shuddering breath, and moved back, swaying as if she had been on the point of fainting.

"Water — you said you wanted water——"

"No matter!" He forced himself to his feet. "I'll get it—there must be a spring——"

But in spite of her apparent faintness, she reached the door before him.

"No! You will not leave!" and as he started back, frowning: "It would be foolish for you to go. You do not know where there is a spring. Besides"—there was something almost cunning in her eyes—"you are tired; you have lost much blood——"

Her voice rose weirdly, and she turned and ran from him, sending the word echoing back to him from the trees—"Blood . . . blood . . ."

HE DETERMINED to leave at once, in spite of his exhaustion, and was about to step out of doors when he saw the girl's hawthorn bough across the threshold, and stooped to put it aside. It was too lovely to tread on. The next moment, he regretted his softness, for the movement seemed to liberate a swarm of bees, which had apparently been stealing honey from the flowers. There were so many of them that it would have been foolhardy to force a way through them, and he drew back into the shelter of the hut, furious at the delay.

At any moment the girl might come back, and he found himself dreading her return. What was it about the cottage, about her, that filled him with such terror? America, with its healthy matter-of-factness, seemed of another world; here, his atavism owned him, claimed him through immemorial centuries for forgotten beliefs and fears. A week before, he would have scorned any hysterical girl for believing in the fancies which held him now. He kept telling himself that it was all ridiculous—but the slash across his cheek proved that, ridiculous or not, there was real danger here. Instinct warned him that he must get away before the owner returned, and he was about to chance the bees when he remembered the pot on the hob.

It would take only a second to investigate it; and he realized that there was something about it—something which he must know.

He crossed to the hearth, and holding his breath, removed the heavy lid. A thin bluish vapor rose and twisted upward. He peered into the black interior but could see nothing. At the same instant he heard a footstep, and replacing the cover, whirled around.

The girl stood in the doorway, an earthen ewer in her hand. Apparently she had no suspicion of his prying, and entered the place as casually as though there were no need for haste or fear or distrust; and her first words held none of the suggestion that had undertoned her last ones.

"If you'll come into the light, I'll bathe it——"

Instead of gratitude, revulsion filled him. "No—I'll do it. Thanks. Out there. Are the bees gone?"

"Bees?" He thought he heard a faint note of mockery behind the monosyllable, but her face was guileless. "There are no bees hereabouts."

He was on the point of speaking, but thought better of it, and seated himself on the stone lintel. The girl leaned against the door jamb, watching; and as the water cleansed the slash, and the blood began to flow, he realized that she was quivering, and felt a sudden overwhelming nausea.

He had no doubt now that she was mad, and that her insanity was liberated by blood—the sight, even the thought, of it shaking her equilibrium. He had heard many strange tales of maniacs who seemed normal until some slight mishap overthrew their delicate mental balance.

"Go inside," he said harshly, and when she did not move, he looked up. "Go on!"

She ran her tongue over her lips. He

saw that it was pointed, and too red. It touched the corner of her mouth—the little red stain. Her eyes glittered.

He trembled with horrid realization, and sprang to his feet.

She fell back before him—and was suddenly only a normal, beautiful girl—laughing a little.

"You are nervous. What is the matter?"

He hesitated. Should he confront her with his discovery, make a bold front and tell her the truth?

"Come in," she said, and there was only quiet invitation in her tone. But he shuddered.

"No. I'm going on, now. Thanks."

"Going on?" She shook her head. "But you can't. The storm——"

He had not noticed a storm before. He could have sworn that there had been no sign of one a moment before; yet now the sky was black, and the heavy menace of thunder shook the place. A drop splashed at his feet.

"You see? And there is no regular road from here. It would be foolish—even dangerous——"

She was still standing just over the sill, but he shook his head.

"I'll watch it from here. I'm not afraid of storms."

Her eyes were brooding. "As you wish."

She turned from him, and seemed to fade into the storm-darkness of the hut's interior. He could not see her, and this added to his uneasiness, though he heard her moving about. He shifted his position, so that he could watch the place where she must be; but to know that she was there, and yet discover no trace of her, was worse than not to know her whereabouts.

As if in answer to his thought, a quick flame rose on the hearth. He had heard no match struck, and the effect was that of created, spontaneous light; but he was grateful for it, whatever its source. By it he could see much of the room—and though he could not discover his "hostess," there was a human shadow, unmistakably indicating her presence.

Suddenly, he knew that it was strange that he could not see the girl. Someone was stirring the pot. He could hear the sound of a spoon going round and round in it; he could see it sway and swing to the rhythm.

Yet—*there was no human thing beside that hearth.*

The brew began to bubble. He could hear it—and hear also a soft, persistent muttering. No syllable could he distinguish; yet suddenly, clear as the lightning around him, flashed the key to that night's mystery.

He had been lured by some superhuman force to this place; he was held here by the same force. What it was, no man could say—but it ruled more human beings than any other intangible thing. He was in the spell of witchcraft. The girl was a witch. The bird was no bird—it was a demon, and the laughter that had frozen him was demon-laughter. God knew what was in the terrible pot——

What would be in it by morning?

In swift dread he flung from the doorway; and as if to mock his futility, a sword of fire descended from the sky, split a great tree, crashed it across his path. The shock threw him back against the hut, but he was unconscious of the pain of the impact. He knew only that he must escape—now—at once.

Answering his resolution, the muttering inside became frenzied. The great red hawthorn swayed, bent to the earth. Was it only the wind that moved it, and tossed its branches into a bristling bar-

rier? Hawthorn—he remembered now—it was the witches' tree, and sacred to the Sidhe. No Irishman would harm so much as a leaf of it. When the girl had broken a bough, he should have realized that she was not all human.

Inside the cottage was a hush more dreadful than sound.

He moved very slightly, stared in. The girl stood by the table. She was lighting three candles. He noticed that they were black, and the forgotten phrase, "corpse candle," stirred his memory, made him shiver. Yet by their light she seemed both human and fragile. His courage returned. He strode into the place, determined to make an end of what all his training had taught him was ridiculous.

She turned slowly. Back to the light, she was again a silhouette. In the storm-darkened room he saw her eyes—golden ellipses.

It had been she—she, herself! Not some creature out of hell, to do her bidding—but herself! That limp arm—it was limp from the blow of the stool. Yet the thing he had grasped had been furry—it *had* been an animal——

Out of mediæval legends, out of modern horror-tales, whirled the lore of the werewolf. He remembered a dozen such stories, which he had scorned.

The little red stain at the corner of her mouth. The panting, avid concentration on the slash across his face.

She moved slowly toward him, but he felt himself powerless to stir. Without taking her eyes from him, she reached forward, touched the kettle. It began to swing rhythmically. In the shadows overhead, the demon-bird gibbered.

The pot tipped—more, more. Some of its contents slopped over. A drop or two spattered on the peat; the fire flared greenly. In that ghastly light he saw the widening pool on the floor. It seemed to reach toward him. There was something bloated, parboiled to a dull red, sliding toward him—a human hand, borne on the slow slime.

He started back. Almost without volition, his fingers fled from his brow to his breast, from shoulder to shoulder.

For a moment, he thought that lightning had struck the hut. It quivered as if it had been touched by a mighty finger.

The witch seemed turned to stone—absolutely immobile, only her golden eyes proved that she was still alive.

TIM turned and fled blindly, out of the hut, into the storm. How long he ran, he did not know. He looked back only once — and whether the pursuing golden eyes were real or imaginary he could not have told; but he did not trust to their being imaginary.

He was half fainting when, through the breaking storm, he finally saw the comfortable outlines of a village. As he stumbled into its street, a dozen simple folk hurried to help him. They were curious, over-solicitous—but he kept his own counsel.

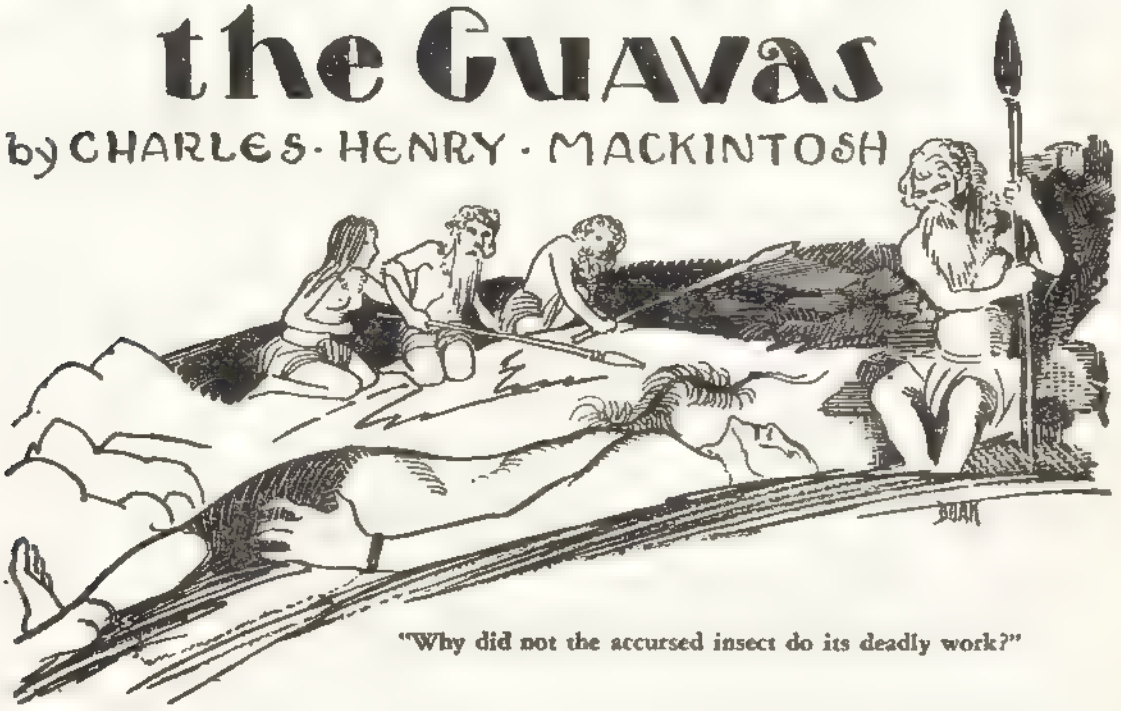
Finally they began to offer him information. They told him that his wounds showed that he had met the fabulous great Wolf of the North. No creature had ever seen it and lived to tell of it. Hundreds of sheep had been slaughtered. Twice, children had disappeared. And recently, a man——

He shuddered, in grim recollection.

But he did not reveal what he had seen. It was true that these countrymen of his might not scoff at the story; the Old World is too wise to reject matters which outstrip ordinary human ken. But Tim had spent most of his life in America—and it had set the seal of incredulity on his Irish lips.

Guardians of the Guavas

by CHARLES · HENRY · MACKINTOSH



"Why did not the accursed insect do its deadly work?"

"NO, I really mean it, Jim!" Jack Hoxton sat up in the long cane chair on the Country Club veranda, the better to emphasize his earnestness. "I haven't lost my money, or been rejected by my best girl; indeed there's no best, or worst, girl to be considered in my case; and the plain fact is I'm sick of civilization—fed up. I'm sailing for the Hawaiian Islands on the next Dollar Line boat!"

Jim Worthington stirred sufficiently in his long chair to regard the flushed face of his young friend quizzically. "Who has been introducing you to the semi-centennial works of Robert Louis Stevenson? Don't you know that the Hawaiian Islands are now at least as civilized as Iowa? You're a quarter of a century too late to take refuge from civilization in Hawaii. Better sail farther and fare worse!"

"Oh, I know that Honolulu and Hilo, and places like that, are as civilized as Chicago or Atlantic City; but there must be places on the islands where a fellow can buy a few acres, run up a shack, and lead the simple life, alone with the silence, the scenery, the sunshine, and the tropical fruits and flowers."

"Well, I wish you the best of luck, if you really mean it; but, just for the sake of having a sporting interest in your venture, I'll bet you an even thousand that you'll be sicker of silence and scenery within one year than you are now of civilization after—how old are you, Jack? —twenty-seven years of it."

"I'll just take that bet. Your thousand will probably come in mighty handy to pay for some pet improvement on my Hawaiian place, a year from now."

"Better catch your place before you start to 'civilize' it; but the bet's on.

Now, is it agreed that you are to write to me regularly and keep me informed as to how near I am getting to winning, or losing, that thousand?"

* * * * * * *

"WELL, Jim, old stay-at-home, this is my first solemn written warning from Aloha Land that you are surely going to lose that thousand! You should have felt a premonitory pang in the region of the pocketbook about two weeks ago, when *I found my place!* It's only about a dozen miles from Honolulu—you'll hoot at that!—but it might be a hundred for all one sees or knows of the city from here. The great Koolau Range runs behind the city, and cuts it off from the windward side of the island of Oahu with a three thousand foot wall of rock. 'Wall' is the right word, too; it rises as nearly perpendicular as any formation can be that has been exposed to erosion for a thousand years or so. It's all solid lava; probably thrust up by some gigantic volcanic action long ago. Its sides are furrowed with gullies, and buttressed with shoulders built up of the eroded material; and that makes it look climable—and it is, for perhaps one-third of the way up. One might even scramble up another third, by picking a particularly likely spot; but the final third would defy a chamois, or a Swiss mountaineer unless he cut his own steps in the solid rock ahead of himself. There are dark patches, just above the line of possible climbability, that look as if they might be the mouths of caves, caused by deeper erosion in softer strata; but no one will ever know whether they are caves unless he flies in an airplane close enough to look down and into them; and no level-headed aviator is likely to try that, with a variable trade wind pouring itself against the base of the wall, and zooming up straight to the Pearly Gates!

"Why so much about my Wall?—I call the mighty Koolau Range 'my wall,' because it is both my barrier against civilization, and the background for all my 'silence and scenery.' My place is about a mile and a half from the base of the Wall. It's on a hill about five hundred feet high; in fact it IS the hill. I've bought the whole thing, with a fence around it, running down to a mountain stream at the base.

"I'm building my house right on the crest of the hill, with a big veranda—they call 'em 'lanai' out here—facing the Wall. I've already roughed out a trail down the hillside through the wild guavas to the stream, where there's a fine swimming-hole fifty or sixty feet long, a dozen wide, and four or five deep. The whole hillside is covered with wild guava bushes at present, but I'll have most of them grubbed out by the time I've won your thousand; and with that I'll buy papaias, banana and coconut palms, mangoes, and the rest; so that in a couple of years more I'll be independent of civilization entirely, except to buy an occasional shirt or pair of shorts, which is all I wear out here."

* * * * * * *

"I'VE been grubbing guavas all day in the hot sun; but it must be a month since last I wrote you a warning that your thousand is already as good as deposited to my account with the First National Bank of Bishop; so I'll see if a change of employment really is as good as a rest. It's amazing what a few weeks of steady work will do with a place like this. My house is finished. It's mostly studio living-room, with a little kitchen, bedroom and bath. I've cleared off the whole of the top of my hill and sown it to grass, with a few flowering shrubs to set off the house and break the fence corners. Now I'm clearing a three-foot trail through

the wild guavas down the face of my hill toward the Wall.

"You should see it—the Wall, I mean! It's never twice the same, what with the drifting clouds and shifting shadows. There are always half a dozen rainbows arched over its buttresses or woven through the clouds around the peaks. It's a tremendous thing to have right in one's own back yard! I stop grubbing guavas, half a hundred times a day, to turn toward it and drink it all in. Reminds me of that old psalm: 'I will lift up mine eyes unto the hills, whence cometh my strength.'

"Something seems to flow down from those jagged peaks, sure enough. Maybe it's streams of prana—vital energy—and the menehunes manufacture it in those caves I told you about in my first letter. Menehunes, by the way, are Hawaiian fairies; or perhaps it would be more accurate to call them gnomes. All the old Hawaiians believe in them. Say they've been seen, many a time. Describe them as being a foot or two tall, with long beards, all dressed in the old Hawaiian style.

"There was a bit in one of the Honolulu papers the other day, about the children at one of the public schools seeing a real live menehune during the noon recess. They all said he was about a foot high, with a long gray beard, and that he went by, grumbling to himself, and eating peanuts out of a paper bag. That paper bag sort of spoils the picture, doesn't it? Sounds too civilized for a menehune. But, anyway, all the children —and there was about a dozen of them, of all races—swore that they really saw him. An hour or so after the paper was out, all the old Hawaiians were down there in the school grounds, helping the children to hunt for the menehune!

"Well, I'm afraid I've been too thoroughly civilized to take much stock in menehunes; but the scenery and the silence are sure going great. I'll be a new man in less than a year's time; but you can count on my being enough of my old self to claim that thousand promptly when it's due!"

* * * * * * *

"YOU are going to win your thousand, after all, Jim; and if it were ten, you'd win it just the same. I am writing this from a private hospital for 'mental cases,' here in Honolulu; but I'm not mad, old man, not that; and just as soon as the doctor thinks that my nerves are calm enough, I'll be boarding the first boat for the mainland. I suppose I should wait and tell you all about it then; but I've another week or two to put in here before they'll let me leave, and it will pass the time, and be a sort of a relief, to tell you in this way, writing a bit at a time and then resting.

"I scarcely know how to begin. The whole thing must sound so incredible to one who hasn't actually gone through it. I'm sure I wouldn't have believed it myself, a month ago; and when I tried to explain to the doctor here how my nerves got in such a condition, he merely gave me a soothing murmur, and something to put me to sleep! But it's true, I tell you, old man, every word of it! Well, I'd better just go back to the beginning and let the tale tell itself:

"It began one night about three weeks ago, when I was sitting on my lanai, facing the huge dark bulk of the Wall a mile and a half away, and smoking my pipe peacefully. I would sit there almost every night, admiring the moonlit view of range and valley; but that night there was no moon, only a powdering of star-dust across the sky making the scene faintly visible. The old Wall loomed up black as a thunder cloud; and, as I

kept my eyes turned toward it, idly, I fancied I saw blue-green lights glowing here and there, about a third of the way from the crest. I thought of those caves I told you about, and wondered whether anyone could possibly be living in them. Then I recalled how utterly inaccessible they appeared in full daylight, and dismissed the notion from my mind. The blue-green lights persisted, however, and the longer I watched them, the more clearly they seemed to demark the entrances to the caves, as I had mentally placed them from many observations. The idea came to me, as I puffed my pipe, that maybe they really were inhabited by menehunes, making their old magic over there where man couldn't get near them. Then I began to wonder again whether a man couldn't manage to scramble up the wooded scarp to one of the larger openings, which I had particularly noted because it was the only one that seemed to present climbable possibilities. Just then the full moon came out, flooding valley and Wall with light no less powerful than that during a half-eclipse of the sun, and curiously like that in quality. So came my crazy notion to hike over to the Wall in the moonlight, and tackle the climb to the cave.

"The blue-green light had been blotted out by the moon, but it was there a minute before, and that seemed to say that whoever, or whatever, inhabited the cave would surely be at home. Like a fool, I didn't even stop to get my flashlight, though I should have remembered that there are always heavy clouds over and around the Koolau Range; and I might have anticipated that the moonlight would fail me before I could complete that three-mile hike, with the climb in the middle of it.

"The moon shone steadily while I crossed the wide valley, following the cow trails through the wild guava, and coming to the open grass land, sloping up to the Wall, where the going was even easier. It couldn't have taken me much more than half an hour from the time the notion seized me till I was beginning my scramble up the steep face of the scarp. I was soon sorry that I hadn't changed to breeches and boots, instead of starting out in the shirt and shorts I'd been wearing all day to work on my trail; those lava needles and guava roots were surely hard on the naked calves and thighs. I cut myself pretty badly, once or twice, and must have lost quite a lot of blood without realizing it. However, I wasn't going to be turned back by a little thing like that; so up I went, pulling myself up two-thirds of my own height, here and there, by holds on guava roots, and having to work a way around many a place where the rock face was sheer perpendicular, with no holds for hands or feet.

"It was much more of a climb than I had anticipated, but I couldn't quit when I must be only a few hundred feet at most from my goal. I looked back for a moment, with one foot on a lava needle and one hand on a guava root, and I was amazed to see how high I had come. The Wall, and the steep slopes, fell away into the moonlit valley beneath me with what looked like an unbroken drop of a third of a mile. Over across the valley, and far beneath the spot where I clung, I could see the lights of my own home on the little hill. I was feeling fairly well done in, what with the hard day's work and the steep climb to which my muscles were not yet accustomed, and then the loss of blood may have weakened me somewhat. How I wished I were back in my comfortable chair, under those lights on the lanai! I wished it more than ever, a moment later; really,

wished it, as a drowning man must wish for air; for, just then, the moon went out. It went out just as if a giant hand had reached up and turned off the switch, but, when I strained my eyes up into the dark, I could see a very faint luminosity still there, behind a bank of black cloud which seemed to reach from the Wall to the sea. I remembered that cloud too late. Almost every night, I had seen it drift in from the ocean till it blanketed the valley from midnight till dawn. It must have been just about midnight at that moment; and there was I, in almost black darkness, hanging to a guava root above a drop of a third of a mile!

"I think my nerve began to crack at that moment; but the one thing that I couldn't possibly do was to stay where I was until morning. Already, I felt my damp hand slipping on the smooth guava root. I must move, up or down, and I already knew only too well the impossible danger in the darkness of the way over which I had come in the bright moonlight. It's always easier to climb up than down, anyway, feeling for one's holds with the naked hand rather than with the shod foot.

"I don't know how long I climbed through the terrible blackness, or how far. It seemed an age, and a mile or more, but it was probably less than an hour, and I doubt whether I had gained much more than fifty feet on the perpendicular, under the almost impossible conditions of the climb. I was beginning to crack with fatigue, too. Each upward inch seemed to call for the last possible ounce of vital energy, and still there was always another ounce for the next inch. It couldn't last, though, and I caught myself deliberately contemplating the possibility of letting go and dropping away from all this unendurable labor into the peace of the valley.

"I couldn't do it. We may think such thoughts, but our bodies won't let us surrender to them while there is a spark of vitality left. The end came soon enough anyway. I had tested the guava root with almost the whole weight of my body, while my left foot rested firmly enough on another; but, as I swung free on it, there was a tearing sound that sent a clammy claw clutching down on my heart muscles. They tell you that men falling from great heights relive their lives in a flash, like drowning men. It may be so with some; but my mind was a blank, an aching void, as my body arched back and shot into the blackness. I believe I gave one shrill scream, but I'm not sure of that. Then—and I've no idea how long it was, since a second can contain eternity under such conditions—I crashed, and the world went away from all my senses.

"GRADUALLY I became conscious of a kind of blue-green luminosity surrounding me. I remember wondering whether I had fallen into the sea, and my body was lying in some deep, cool, coral cave. Absurd, of course; the sea was miles away. The moon must have come out again. I looked up, and saw above a roof of rough rock. I realized that I was lying across a sloping shoulder of the same substance, my legs straddling it, my arms hanging down on either side of its curved surface, while the not too rounded peak of that bit into my backbone. Next I realized that I was stark naked; my shirt and shorts must have been ripped away in the fall . . . I remembered the fall. So I was still alive, and this must be some rocky cleft which had caught and rolled me back under its overhanging roof.

"I was alive! I started to lift my arms, intending to move to a more comfortable

position, and it was then that real fear caught at my throat and heart, for I was *chained,* chained to the rock at neck, wrist, thigh and ankle, with thin sharp chains, strong as steel, that bit into my flesh at the least movement. Only the neck chain, being just above the collarbones, allowed me to lift my head a little and peer about me into the weird blue-green luminosity, seeking a cause for my condition, yet fearing to find it.

"I saw that this was no mere cleft in the rock, but a long wide cavern with a low roof. Directly before the rock to which I was chained, there was a sort of rock throne, tiny, but large enough for the grotesque figure which occupied it. He was, perhaps, two feet high. A lei of brightly colored flowers hung around his scrawny throat and was lost beneath his long gray beard. He wore a colorful waist-cloth, nothing more. His right hand held a spear about the size of a clothyard arrow.

"Surrounding him, in a half moon, but at a respectful distance behind, there was a countless crowd of similar figures; some bearded and gray, some smooth-faced, lithe and young; all dressed in the same manner as their king—for such I took the seated figure to be—and all armed with tiny weapons.

"Could this be a primitive race of Hawaiian pigmies, still surviving unknown to modern man, hidden away in these almost inaccessible caves? Or—the truth flashed across my mind, to be dismissed as surest folly—could it be true, after all, about the menehunes, the fairy people, and had I fallen into their power? But surely fairy people would be gentle and kindly! They would not crucify a stranger in chains upon their rocks, and stare at him with hard, cold, unwinking brown eyes! Yet perhaps they hated the white man and his crushing civilization. Did I not hate it, too? I must tell them that, explain that I had fled from it to their own land; and then their faces would glow with warm friendliness, and they would hasten to release the chains.

"Before I could speak, there came a voice so high and thin that I seemed to be hearing it inside my own head rather than through my ears; yet I knew that it came from the seated figure, and I marveled that its English was as perfect as my own at its best.

" 'Stranger, you venture to question our hospitality?'

"A guess; a logical deduction; or, had he read my thought?

"Promptly came the reply: 'Your thought speaks to me as mine to you; and now I will put to you another question, although without expectation that you will answer it honestly: What are the limitations of hospitality? Shall a host suffer his guest to destroy his property and even the persons of those placed in his charge, yet withhold his hand because of the claims of hospitality?'

"What was the meaning of this mad rigmarole?—I was not his guest, nor he my host; but, even if we stood in that relation, certainly I had destroyed none of his property, nor injured the persons of any of his people . . . Yet might I, perhaps, have done so in a mad delirium, following my fall? Was that why I came back to consciousness to find myself in chains?

"Again he read my thought. 'You have done no harm, except to yourself, since you came to this place. You have my young men to thank that the harm was no greater. They caught you as you fell, and brought you here to me with nothing but a few scratches and bruises.'

"I started to stammer my thanks, forgetting my chains for the moment; but I

was interrupted coldly: 'The words were not well supplied. You owe us no thanks for your broken fall, because we drew you here and gave you the opportunity to fall. You believe it to have been your own idea, born of moonlight and curiosity; but it came to you across the valley from this cave, carried on the blue-green radiance which first attracted your attention. We summoned you here to our court because a judgment has been passed upon you, and it is necessary to its right execution that you shall know what it is, and whence it came, and why.'

"I forgot my chains, and they bit savagely at my flesh as I attempted to rise in my indignation. 'What kind of court is this, that passes judgment in the absence of the defendant, without hearing his plea or admitting evidence?'

" 'It is a court in which no mental evasions are at all possible,' the voice replied, more mildly than before, though perhaps it only seemed so in contrast to my own hotness. 'Your crimes were committed before our very eyes. Day after day, hundreds of us have seen and by thought power have tried to check your mad destructiveness; but it seemed that you responded to our impulses only by swinging your blade faster and harder!'

"What, in God's name, could this lunatic be talking, or rather thinking about! He answered me in two words: 'The guavas!' and I laughed aloud. It was a mad thing to do, for the little old man seemed serious enough; but the idea of being charged with the murder of wild guava bushes!

"My ill-judged mirth quite altered the quality of the voice that continued to ring in my head. No longer had it even the slightest suggestion of a thin silver flute, as before, but rather that of an angry bumblebee.

" 'Your laughter is evidence of the incredible obtuseness of your blundering, destructive, murdering breed. In your blind arrogance, you have at last succeeded in persuading yourselves that you may destroy what and where you will, so that it serves your comfort, your pleasure, or your greed!'

" 'But I *own* the place on which I have been clearing away the guavas!' I burst in indignantly.

" 'You *own* it?' The voice came high and incredulous. 'By what superior right do you claim personal ownership of any part of the King's domain, granted in common to His children in return for their loving labor upon it?'

" 'What king are you talking about?' I demanded petulantly. 'I understand that Hawaii is a part of the Republic of the United States. No king has any rights here!'

" 'Him whom we call the King has His rights everywhere on land and sea and in the air. He is the King of the World . . . but enough of that; your thoughts no less than your actions proclaim that you know Him not. What of this absurd claim to ownership which you advance in defense of your murderous invasions upon our sacred charges, the guavas? If any truly own that land, must it not be the elemental spirits that co-operated to create the soil, the earthworms that prepared it for plant food, the guavas themselves, that laboriously builded it into the tissues of their living bodies—why have they not better title to the land than you? They have been there for half a century, and you for little more than one moon!'

" 'But I bought and paid for the place!' I protested with half-incredulous resentment.

" 'From what Great Chief did you buy it? With what act of splendid service did you pay for it?'

"My temper was tiring of this incred-

ible conversation. 'I bought it from the legal owner, and paid for it in hard, cold American dollars, I answered shortly, realizing, as I spoke, that my adjectives had not been well chosen.

"Sure enough, he repeated them: 'Hard, cold; but the hard may be softened and the cold warmed by the White Flame, whose ministers and servants are we.'

"Fortunately I had already learned that the ancient Hawaiians—those of them who were deemed worthy of initiation into their Mysteries—worship the White Flame of the eternal life force; or I might have taken that last statement as a threat of ordeal by fire. Perhaps it would have been more pleasant, after all, than what actually came.

" 'Pain, and Fear of pain,' said the voice. 'Thus does the White Flame burn the dross out of the brains of beings like yourself, corrupted by the false sense of the self separated from the One Self. We may not kill'—I drew a breath of relief at that statement—'we may not ourselves execute the judgment of the guavas upon your person, but, fortunately for the occasion, we have humbler ministers who are not so bound.' He pronounced a name which I could not spell if I could remember it; but my renewed apprehension prevented me even from paying attention to it. What terror would be loosed upon me now?

"In the utter silence of the cavern, there came to my strained sense of hearing a sound as of the scratching of innumerable tiny claws upon the rock. Crabs? Spiders? What—an army of them? I felt a scratching at my left ankle, a procession of tiny claws rhythmically climbing to the bone.

"Pressing my throat to the utmost against its chain, I saw that which had never before existed even in my imagination. It was almost a foot in length, jetty black, glistening black, as though carved out of polished hard rubber, yet every inch, every atom of its contours was tremendously, horribly alive. The sense of the vitality packed into that small compass was shocking. I saw it more clearly as it drew its dreadful length across my kneecap. It had a head, but no face. Its body was simply a procession of tiny claws mounted in black knobs which moved with the regularity of some mechanical thing. Up my thigh, and to my chest just below my throat, it came, and there it paused.

" 'We note, with surprize, that you are not already acquainted with our little friend,' said the voice with what seemed to me to be dreadful irony. 'Were you an Hawaiian, with some knowledge of the land you presume to claim, you would have torn those chains deeply into your own flesh at the sight of him, before you could recall that you were chained—and you *are* chained, you know.'

" 'What is it?' I croaked.

"The response was disconcertingly prompt: 'It is the one being in this land of love—excluding those like yourself who are here by fraud or by force—which rules and conquers all—even Man—by Fear. It is the Great Centipede.'

"A centipede!—but those were tiny pallid things never more than an inch or so in length. This giant, waving his blind tentacles almost at my throat, and opening and closing his mighty tail shears with clearly audible sound, was no true centipede, but rather a ghastly nightmare of one, seen through a blackened and disordered brain, magnified a millionfold!

" 'It is not a vision,' said the voice, with gentle insistence; 'it is an actual being, as you shall soon have ample cause to know.'

"So my fate was to be—stinging to death by this hateful and malodorous insect! I felt a cold wind blow between the epidermis and the dermis all over my body, and I fancied I could hear the hair at the base of my head crackle as it rose on end!

"As though obeying some unspoken command, the nightmare insect renewed its rhythmical march, across my throat, over my chin, and paused again only when its blindly waving tentacles seemed to command a view of my face.

" 'Look closely; look well, O king of the centipedes!' said the voice; 'for this one lies under the curse of the centipedes. Let it follow him, let it pursue him, till he be frenzied with fear: this for the harm he has wrought; let it follow, let it pursue till he lift the curse of his presence from our land, and so—and only so—lift the curse from himself! This for the harm that must not be wrought by him!'

"As the voice ceased, the mighty insect deliberately turned about. For a second I saw the glistening plier-jaws with which its tail was armed, waving threateningly beneath my very nose; then it resumed its rhythmical march over my chin, coming again to my throat, where it paused, apparently with its head about over one carotid artery and its terrible tail over the other. Now, if the insect were indeed as deadly as the voice had suggested it to be, and if it were to be the instrument of my destruction, it was in position to spread its venom swiftly throughout the blood stream.

"The pause lengthened out interminably, while the cavern was caught in breathless silence. Not alone my nerves were at unbearable tension, but every tendon was tightly stretched, every muscle rock-hard, tensed to receive, and, if possible, to endure I knew not what fiendish shock of awful agony. This waiting, surely, was worse than the event could possibly be! Why did not the accursed insect do its deadly work?—or was it, perhaps, awaiting the final command from the king of the menehunes?

"That command came, like the crack of a tiny pistol shot in the stillness. It was, I think, the same word with which the awful insect had been summoned; but, once again, my nervous tension was too great for me to pay attention to anything but that. Instinctively, as the command came, I drew still tighter the already terrible tension of nerve and tendon and muscle. Something seemed to snap. There was a flashing blaze of blue-white brilliance; then blackness, instantaneous and absolute.

"I SEEMED to drift upward to the surface of the sea of consciousness through miles of blue-green water; but always with the same horrible sensation of something dreadful and unclean clinging about my throat. The light grew clearer, yellower. I became conscious of my limbs pressing into the woven cane of —the chair on my own lanai. I was there; and dawn was just breaking over the Needles in the east—but these facts were verbalized later. For the time I was frightfully conscious only of one sensation—there *was* something, clammy, and close-clinging, like a necklace of tiny tiger claws, about my throat!

"With a shrill scream, I leapt to my feet. Perhaps the scream, the vibration in my throat, was what saved me, for I have learned since that these deadly insects are apt to clamp down instinctively upon feeling a sudden loss of support. There was a scratching thud on the cement floor of the lanai; and there at my feet, eight or ten inches of liquid legs churned and thrashed in blind semicir-

cles. Then it straightened out, and flowed —toward me!—for all the world like a thick streak of black oil flowing down a steeply sloping floor.

"My first instinct was to leap upon it with my shod feet, and it was then that I realized that my feet were *not* shod; that my body was as naked as it had been in the cavern. You will say—as the doctor said—that it was all a dream, brought on by the actual contact of the real centipede's claws; but how will you account for this fact: that I was stark naked; my clothes were gone, and I have never found them to this day? Realizing my defenseless condition, I made no further move toward the terror, you may well believe. Instead, I dashed for the door faster than I have ever run before; yet, fast though I ran, the cursed creature was at my heels as I slammed the door between myself and it, and sank, with deep sobbing breaths, into an easy-chair.

"God, what a ghastly experience! Dream, nightmare, or not — and I did not stop to analyze then—at least there was the fact of that giant centipede on the doorstep outside. If this lovely country was infested with such terrors, would it not prove more of a purgatory than a paradise? I seemed to hear the baffled horror scratching, scratching with its tiny terrible claws at my door—and there *was* a scratching, louder and louder as I listened intently; but it was not at the door—it was, it was on the back of the chair in which I lay exhausted!

"I leapt to my feet again, and in the clear light of dawn, saw *another* — or could it possibly be the same?—giant centipede just flowing over the head-rest, where my head had rested a half-second ago! I sped to my bedroom. I slammed the door. I stuffed ties and handkerchiefs into the crack beneath it, and into every opening through which it seemed that even an ant could make its way. I threw back the bedclothes, and — yes, I had sensed that it would be inevitable—but not one, *two* of the giant centipedes lay coiled together just under the front edge of the pillow!

"At the sight, suprizingly enough, I lost my fear for the moment, and grew cold with rage. I seized the first weapon that came to hand—it happened to be a shoe—and brought it down with terrific force upon both of them. It seemed impossible to kill them. I seemed to pound and pound at them for hours. Even after they were ground into the sheet, ruining it forever, still flickers and tremors of horrible vitality shook the fragments as though they would again unite and attack me! After that, I stripped the bed, turned the mattress, and lay down under the single upper sheet after shaking it till I almost tore the hem. I lay there, but not to sleep. No sooner would I close my eyes, than I would see armies of giant centipedes flowing toward me through the darkness, and I would start up with a half-suppressed scream.

"Fortunately there was but an hour or so of that. My Japanese servant came at seven. Had he been late that morning, he might have found a madman for a master! As it was, I was dangerously irritable. I cursed him for a sloven, in permitting these poisonous pests to get foothold in my house. In vain he protested that he had seen none of the great centipedes; that they were, indeed, exceedingly rare, and that one might live a lifetime in the islands and never see one. Had I not seen four—no, *five*, counting the one in the cavern!—during that very night of horror? I seized the sheet and found the dreadful remains of my battle and shook it in his face.

" 'See! See for yourself!' I screamed, rather than spoke.

"He examined the remains carefully, and shook his head. 'That danger',' he said, 'most danger'—bite, swell up, mebbe die, dunno.'

"But the sole effect of the ocular demonstration was that I lost my Japanese servant. He slipped away shortly before noon, and I never saw him again.

"Well, I dare not, for my own sake, retrace the details of the next three days. They were one continuous nightmare, with the added horror of knowing clearly that one was wide awake. Whenever I turned, wherever I turned, my eyes would fall upon one of these poisonous pests. I went about armed with a tightly rolled magazine, and got so that I would strike out as I turned without waiting to verify the presence of the pest. That was how all my crockery got broken. When my neighbor called—as he did near to the end of the third day—it was that fact that made him so sure that I must have been drinking the native 'oke' to the verge of delirium tremens. I told him the whole tale as calmly as possible; but that only served to increase his conviction. He suggested that I had better let him take me to town in his car—said he knew a doctor, knew the very place for me. I consented, not because I needed a doctor, but just to get away.

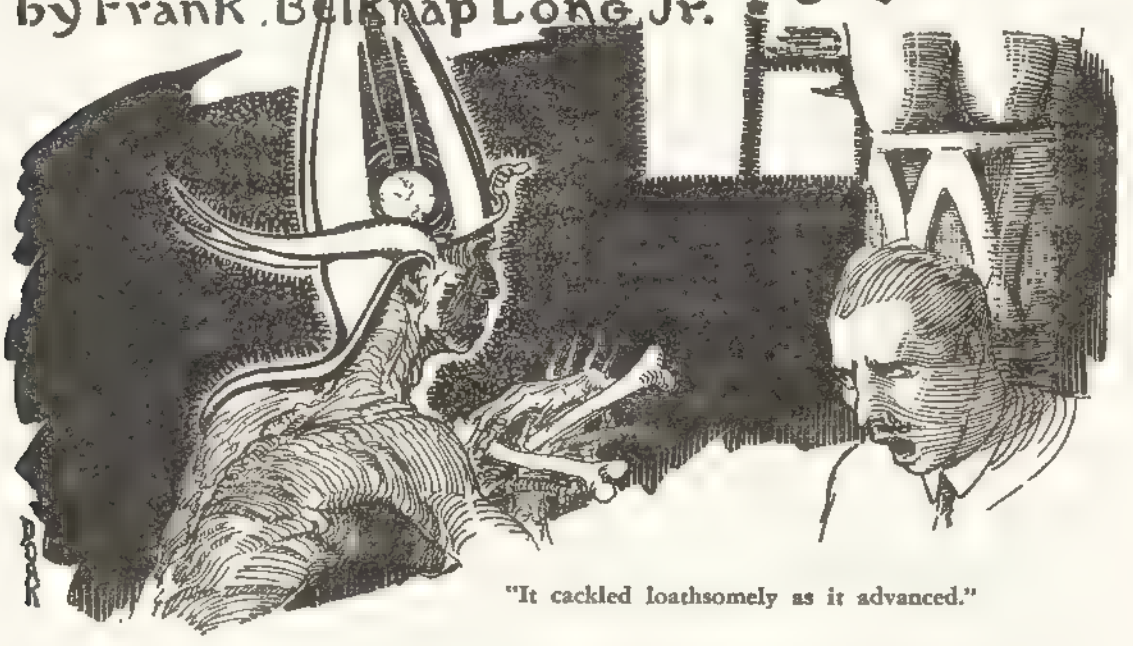
"I might have known that I couldn't get away so easily as that. The curse of the centipedes was clearly in my mind. Not till I left—not till I leave—these islands shall I be free from it. There was one waiting for me on the pillow of the hospital bed. It slipped away, like a streak of black oil, as I struck at it, and vanished through some crack in the base boarding. It was gone when the doctor and the nurse turned at my scream. I showed them where it had been, and where I thought it had gone. They were interested, and sympathetic—too much so. I could see that they were infected by the belief of my neighbor, the one who had brought me to the hospital. The doctor says I shall be all right in a few days, or a week or two at most; but I know better. The fact that these omnipresent centipedes never seem to bite has brought a certain dull apathy into my feeling about them; and yet I have a certain inner sense that warns me to hold to my resolve to leave the islands as soon as I can, or a secondary stage of the curse may manifest!

"I have sold my place at a great sacrifice. In fact, it brought me just a little over the thousand I shall pay you when I see you in a couple of weeks' time."

DEAR Mr. Worthington: The enclosed letter, or manuscript, was found under the pillow of the bed occupied by your friend, Mr. John Hoxton, during his stay here at the hospital. As you already know from our cables, he was found dead by the night nurse, and when the body was lifted from the bed, a giant centipede was crushed around the back of his neck. The virus appears to have entered at the carotids, and, in the enfeebled state of the patient, death must have followed very quickly. It is indeed strange that his amazing illusion should have been brought to a conclusion by a real insect of the type he feared; and it is the more to be regretted, because Dr. Benson was very hopeful of a complete cure. Just the day before, he had succeeded in convincing Mr. Hoxton that he must remain and fight and defeat this fear here in the islands, or it would leave a permanent psychopathic complex.

A Visitor From Egypt

by Frank Belknap Long Jr.



"It cackled loathsomely as it advanced."

ON A dismal rainy afternoon in August a tall, very thin gentleman tapped timidly on the frosted glass window of the curator's office in a certain New England museum. He wore a dark blue Chinchilla overcoat, olive-green Homburg hat with high tapering crown, yellow gloves, and spats. A blue silk muffler with white dots encircled his neck and entirely concealed the lower portion of his face and virtually all of his nose. Only a small expanse of pink and very wrinkled flesh was visible above the muffler and below his forehead, but as this exposed portion of his physiognomy contained his eyes it was as arresting as it was meager. So arresting indeed was it that it commanded instant respect, and the attendants, who were granted liberal weekly emoluments for merely putting yards of red tape between the main entrance and the narrow corridor that led to the curator's office, waived all of their habitual and asinine inquiries and conducted the muffled gentleman straight to what a Victorian novelist would have called the sacred precincts.

Having tapped, the gentleman waited. He waited patiently, but something in his manner suggested that he was extremely nervous and perturbed and decidely on edge to talk to the curator. And yet when the door of the office at last swung open, and the curator peered out fastidiously from behind gold-rimmed spectacles, he merely coughed and extended a visiting-card.

The card was conservatively fashionable in size and exquisitely engraved, and as soon as the curator perused it his countenance underwent an extraordinary alteration. He was ordinarily a supremely reticent individual with long, pale face and lugubrious, condescending eyes, but he suddenly became preposterously friendly and greeted his visitor with an effusiveness that was almost hysterical.

He seized his visitor's somewhat flabby gloved hand and gave it a Babbittesque squeeze. He nodded and bowed and smirked and seemed almost beside himself with gratification.

"If only I had known, Sir Richard, that you were in America! The papers were unusually silent—outrageously silent, you know. I can not imagine how you managed to elude the reporters. They are usually so persistent, so indecently curious. I really can not imagine how you achieved it!"

"I did not wish to talk to idiotic old women, to lecture before mattoids, to have my photo reproduced in your absurd papers." Sir Richard's voice was oddly high-pitched, almost effeminate, and it quivered with the intensity of his emotion. "I *detest* publicity, and I regret that I am not utterly unknown in this—er—region."

"I quite understand, Sir Richard," murmured the curator soothingly. "You naturally desired leisure for research, for discussion. You were not interested in what the vulgar would say or think about you. A commendable and eminently scholarly attitude to take, Sir Richard! A splendid attitude! I quite understand and sympathize. We Americans have to be polite to the press occasionally, but you have no idea how it cramps our style, if I may use an expressive but exceedingly coarse colloquialism. It really does, Sir Richard. You have no idea—but do come in. Come in, by all means. We are honored immeasurably by the visit of so eminent a scholar."

SIR RICHARD bowed stiffly and preceded the curator into the office. He selected the most comfortable of the five leather-backed chairs that encircled the curator's desk and sank into it with a faintly audible sigh. He neither removed his hat nor withdrew the muffler from his pinkish visage.

The curator selected a seat on the opposite side of the table and politely extended a box of Havana panetelas. "Extremely mild," he murmured. "Won't you try one, Sir Richard?"

Sir Richard shook his head. "I have never smoked," he said, and coughed.

There ensued a silence. Then Sir Richard apologized for the muffler. "I had an unfortunate accident on the ship," he explained. "I stumbled in one of the deck games and cut my face rather badly. It's in a positively unpresentable condition. I know you'll pardon me if I don't remove this muffler."

The curator gasped. "How horrible, Sir Richard! I can sympathize, believe me. I hope that it will not leave a scar. One should have the most expert advice in such matters. I hope—Sir Richard, have you consulted a specialist, may I ask?"

Sir Richard nodded. "The wounds are not deep—nothing serious, I assure you. And now, Mr. Buzzby, I should like to discuss with you the mission that has brought me to Boston. Are the predynastic remains from Luxor on exhibition?"

The curator was a trifle disconcerted. He had placed the Luxor remains on exhibition that very morning, but he had not as yet arranged them to his satisfaction, and he would have preferred that his distinguished guest should view them at a later date. But he very clearly perceived that Sir Richard was so intensely interested that nothing that he could say would induce him to wait, and he *was* proud of the remains and flattered that England's ablest Egyptologist should have come to the city expressly to see them. So he nodded amiably and confessed that the bones were on exhibition,

and he added that he would be delighted and honored if Sir Richard would view them.

"They are truly marvelous," he explained. "The pure Egyptian type—dolichocephalic, with relatively primitive features. And they date—Sir Richard, they date from at least 8000 B. C."

"Are the bones tinted?"

"I should say so, Sir Richard! They are wonderfully tinted, and the original colors have scarcely faded at all. Blue and red, Sir Richard, with red predominating."

"Hm. A most absurd custom," murmured Sir Richard.

Mr. Buzzby smiled. "I have always considered it pathetic, Sir Richard. Infinitely amusing, but pathetic. They thought that by painting the bones they could preserve the vitality of the corruptible body. Corruption putting on incorruption, as it were."

"It was blasphemous!" Sir Richard had arisen from his chair. His face, above the muffler, was curiously white, and there was a hard, metallic glitter in his small dark eyes. "They sought to cheat Osiris! They had no conception of hyperphysical realities!"

The curator stared curiously. "Precisely what do you mean, Sir Richard?"

Sir Richard started a trifle at the question, as though he were awakening from some strange nightmare, and his emotion ebbed as rapidly as it had arisen. The glitter died out of his eyes and he sank listlessly back in his chair. "I—I was merely amused by your comment. As though by merely painting their mummies they could restore the circulation of the blood!"

"But that, as you know, Sir Richard, would occur in the other world. It was one of the most distinctive prerogatives of Osiris. He alone could restore the dead."

"Yes, I know," murmured Sir Richard. "They counted a good deal on Osiris. It is curious that it never occurred to them that the god might be offended by their presumptions."

"You are forgetting the Book of the Dead, Sir Richard. The promises in that are very definite. And it is an inconceivably ancient book. I am strongly convinced that it was in existence in 10,000 B. C. You have read my brochure on the subject?"

Sir Richard nodded. "A very scholarly work. But I believe that the Book of the Dead as we know it was a forgery!"

"Sir Richard!"

"Parts of it are undoubtedly pre-dynastic, but I believe that the Judgment of the Dead, which defines the judicial prerogatives of Osiris, was inserted by some meddling priest as late as the historical period. It is a deliberate attempt to modify the relentless character of Egypt's supreme deity. Osiris does not judge, he *takes*."

"He takes, Sir Richard?"

"Precisely. Do you imagine anyone can ever cheat death? Do you imagine that, Mr. Buzzby? Do you imagine for one moment that Osiris would restore to life the fools that returned to him?"

Mr. Buzzby colored. It was difficult to believe that Sir Richard was really in earnest. "Then you honestly believe that the character of Osiris as we know it is——"

"A myth, yes. A deliberate and childish evasion. No man can ever comprehend the character of Osiris. He is the Dark God. *But he treasures his own.*"

"Eh?" Mr. Buzzby was genuinely startled by the tone of ferocity in which the last remark was uttered. "What did you say, Sir Richard?"

"Nothing." Sir Richard had risen and was standing before a small revolv-

ing bookcase in the center of the room. "Nothing, Mr. Buzzby. But your taste in fiction interests me extremely. I had no idea you read young Finchley!"

Mr. Buzzby blushed and looked genuinely distressed. "I don't ordinarily," he said. "I despise fiction ordinarily. And young Finchley's romances are unutterably silly. He isn't even a passable scholar. But that book has—well, there are a few good things in it. I was reading it this morning on the train and put it with the other books temporarily because I had no other place to put it. You understand, Sir Richard? We all have our little foibles, eh? A work of fiction now and then is sometimes—er—well, suggestive. And H. E. Finchley is rather suggestive occasionally."

"He is, indeed. His Egyptian redactions are imaginative masterpieces!"

"You amaze me, Sir Richard. Imagination in a scholar is to be deplored. But of course, as I said, H. E. Finchley is not a scholar and his work is occasionally illuminating if one doesn't take it too seriously."

"He knows his Egypt."

"Sir Richard, I can't believe you really approve of him. A mere fictionist——"

Sir Richard had removed the book and opened it casually. "May I ask, Mr. Buzzby, if you are familiar with Chapter 13, *The Transfiguration of Osiris?*"

"Bless me, Sir Richard, I am not. I skipped that portion. Such purely grotesque rubbish repelled me."

"Did it, Mr. Buzzby? But the repellent is usually arresting. Just listen to this:

"It is beyond dispute that Osiris made his worshipers dream strange things of him, and that he possessed their bodies and souls forever. There is a devilish wrath against mankind with which Osiris was for Death's sake inspired. In the cool of the evening he walked among men, and upon his head was the Crown of Upper Egypt, and his cheeks were inflated with a wind that slew. His face was veiled so that no man could see it, but assuredly it was an old face, very old and dead and dry, for the world was young when tall Osiris died."

Sir Richard snapped the book shut and replaced it in the shelf. "What do you think of that, Mr. Buzzby?" he inquired.

"Rot," murmured the curator. "Sheer, unadulterated rot."

"Of course, of course. Mr. Buzzby, did it ever occur to you that a god may live, figuratively, a dog's life?"

"Eh?"

"Gods are transfigured, you know. They go up in smoke, as it were. In smoke and flame. They become pure flame, pure spirit, creatures with no visible body."

"Dear, dear, Sir Richard, that had not occurred to me." The curator laughed and nudged Sir Richard's arm. "Beastly sense of humor," he murmured, to himself. "The man is unutterably silly."

"It would be dreadful, for example," continued Sir Richard, "if the god had no control over his transfiguration; if the change occurred frequently and unexpectedly; if he shared, as it were, the ghastly fate of a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde."

Sir Richard was advancing toward the door. He moved with a curious, shuffling gait and his shoes scraped peculiarly upon the floor. Mr. Buzzby was instantly at his elbow. "What is the matter, Sir Richard? What has happened?"

"Nothing!" Sir Richard's voice rose in hysterical denial. "Nothing. Where is the lavatory, Mr. Buzzby?"

"Down one flight of stairs on your left as you leave the corridor," muttered Mr. Buzzby. "Are—are you ill?"

"It is nothing, nothing," murmured Sir Richard. "I must have a drink of water, that is all. The injury has—er—affected my throat. When it becomes too dry it pains dreadfully."

"Good heavens!" murmured the cura-

tor. "I can send for water, Sir Richard. I can indeed. I beg you not to disturb yourself."

"No, no, I insist that you do not. I shall return immediately. Please do not send for anything."

Before the curator could renew his protestations Sir Richard had passed through the door and disappeared down the corridor.

MR. BUZZBY shrugged his shoulders and returned to his desk. "A most extraordinary person," he muttered. "Erudite and original, but queer. Decidedly queer. Still, it is pleasant to reflect that he has read my brochure. A scholar of his distinction might very pardonably have overlooked it. He called it a scholarly work. A scholarly work. Hmm. Very gratifying, I'm sure."

Mr. Buzzby clipped and lit a cigar.

"Of course he is wrong about the Book of the Dead," he mused. "Osiris was a most benevolent god. It is true that the Egyptians feared him, but only because he was supposed to judge the dead. There was nothing essentially evil or cruel about him. Sir Richard is quite wrong about that. It is curious that a man so eminent could go so sensationally astray. I can use no other phrase. Sensationally astray. I really believe that my arguments impressed him, though. I could see that he was impressed."

The curator's pleasant reflections were coarsely and unexpectedly interrupted by a shout in the corridor. "Get them extinguishers down! Quick, you b——."

The curator gasped and rose hastily to his feet. Profanity violated all the rules of the museum and he had always firmly insisted that the rules should be obeyed. Striding quickly to the door he threw it open and stared incredulously down the corridor.

"What was that?" he cried. "Did anyone call?"

He heard hurried steps and the sound of someone shouting, and then an attendant appeared at the end of the corridor. "Come quickly, sir!" he exclaimed. "There's fire and smoke comin' out of the basement!"

Mr. Buzzby groaned. What a dreadful thing to happen when he had such a distinguished guest! He raced down the corridor and seized the attendant angrily by the arm. "Did Sir Richard get out?" he demanded. "Answer me! Is Sir Richard down there now?"

"Who?" gasped the attendant.

"The gentleman who went down a few minutes ago, you idiot. A tall gentleman wearing a blue coat?"

"I dunno, sir. I didn't see nobody come up."

"Good God!" Mr. Buzzby was frantic. "We must get him out immediately. I believe that he was ill. He's probably fainted."

He strode to the end of the corridor and stared down the smoke-filled staircase leading to the lavatory. Immediately beneath him three attendants were cautiously advancing. Wet handkerchiefs, bound securely about their faces, protected them from the acrid fumes, and each held at arm's length a cylindrical fire extinguisher. As they descended the stairs they squirted the liquid contents of the extinguishers into the rapidly rising spirals of lethal blue smoke.

"It was much worse a minute ago," exclaimed the attendant at Mr. Buzzby's elbow. "The smoke was thicker and had a most awful smell. Like them dinosaur eggs smelt when you first unpacked 'em last spring, sir."

The attendants had now reached the base of the staircase and were peering cautiously into the lavatory. For a moment they peered in silence, and then one

of them shouted up at Mr. Buzzby. "The smoke's dreadfully dense here, sir. We can't see any flames. Shall we go in, sir?"

"Yes, do!" Mr. Buzzby's voice was tragically shrill. "Do all you can. Please!"

THE attendants disappeared into the lavatory and the curator waited with an agonized and expectant air. His heart was wrung at the thought of the fate which had in all probability overtaken his distinguished guest, but he could not think of anything further to do. Sinister forebodings crowded into his mind, but he was powerless to act.

Then it was that the shrieks commenced. From whatever cause arising they were truly ghastly, but they began so suddenly, so unexpectedly, that at first the curator could form no theory as to what had caused them. They issued so horribly and suddenly from the lavatory, echoing and re-echoing through the empty corridors, that the curator could only stare and gasp.

But when they became fairly coherent, when the screams of affright turned to appeals for mercy, for pity, and when the language in which they found grim expression changed too, becoming familiar to the curator but incomprehensible to the man beside him, a dreadful incident occurred which the latter has never been able to consign to a merciful mnemonic oblivion.

The curator fell upon his knees, literally went down upon his knees at the head of the staircase and raised both arms in an unmistakable gesture of supplication. And then from his ashen lips there poured a torrent of grotesque gibberish:

"sdmw stn Osiris! sdmw stn Osiris! sdmw stn Osiris! sdm-f Osiris! Oh, sdm-f Osiris! sdmw stn Osiris!"

"Fool!" A muffled form emerged from the lavatory and ponderously ascended the stairs. "Fool! You—you have sinned irretrievably!" The voice was guttural, harsh, remote, and seemed to come from an immeasurable distance.

"Sir Richard! Sir Richard!" The curator got stumblingly to his feet and staggered toward the ascending figure. "Protect me, Sir Richard. There's something unspeakable down there. I thought—for a moment I thought—Sir Richard, did you *see* it? Did you hear anything? those shrieks——"

But Sir Richard did not reply. He did not even look at the curator. He brushed past the unfortunate man as though he were a mere meddling fool, and grimly began to climb the stairs that led to the Hall of Egyptian Antiquities. He ascended so rapidly that the curator could not catch up with him, and before the frightened man had reached the halfway landing his steps were resounding on the tiled floor above.

"Wait, Sir Richard!" shrieked Buzzby. "Wait, please! I am sure that you can explain everything. I am afraid. Please wait for me!"

A spasm of coughing seized him, and at that moment there ensued a most dreadful crash. Fragments of broken glass tinkled suggestively upon the stone floor, and awoke ominous echoes in the corridor and up and down the winding stairway. Mr. Buzzby clung to the banisters and moaned. His face was purplish and distorted with fear and beads of sweat glistened on his high forehead. For a moment he remained thus cowering and whimpering on the staircase. Then, miraculously, his courage returned. He ascended the last flight three steps at a time and dashed wildly forward.

An intolerable thought had abruptly been born in the poor, bewildered brain of Mr. Buzzby. It had suddenly occurred

to him that Sir Richard was an impostor, a murderous madman intent only upon destruction, and that his collections were in immediate danger. Whatever Mr. Buzzby's human deficiencies, in his professional capacity he was conscientious and aggressive to an almost abnormal degree. And the crash had been unmistakable and susceptible of only one explanation. Mr. Buzzby completely forgot his fear in his concern for his precious collections. Sir Richard had smashed one of the cases and was extracting its contents! There was little doubt in Mr. Buzzby's mind as to which of the cases Sir Richard had smashed. "The Luxor remains can never be duplicated," he moaned. "I have been horribly duped!"

Suddenly he stopped, and stared. At the very entrance to the Hall lay an assortment of garments which he instantly recognized. There was the blue chinchilla coat and the Alpine Homburg with its high tapering crown, and the blue silk muffler that had concealed so effectively the face of his visitor. And on the very top of the heap lay a pair of yellow suede gloves.

"Good God!" muttered Mr. Buzzby. "The man has shed all of his clothes!"

He stood there for a moment staring in utter bewilderment and then with long, hysterical strides he advanced into the hall. "A hopeless maniac," he muttered, under his breath. "A sheer, raving lunatic. Why did I not——"

Then, abruptly, he ceased to reproach himself. He forgot entirely his folly, the heap of clothes, and the smashed case. Everything that had up to that moment occupied his mind was instantly extruded and he shriveled and shrank with fear. Never had the unwilling gaze of Mr. Buzzby encountered such a sight.

Mr. Buzzby's visitor was bending over the shattered case and only his back was visible. But it was not an ordinary back. In a lucid, unemotional moment Mr. Buzzby would have called it a nasty, malignant back, but in juxtaposition with the crown that topped it there is no Aryan polysyllable suggestive enough to describe it. For the crown was very tall and ponderous with jewels and unspeakably luminous, and it accentuated the vileness of the back. It was a green back. *Sapless* was the word that ran through Mr. Buzzby's mind as he stood and stared at it. And it was wrinkled, too, horribly wrinkled, all crisscrossed with centuried grooves.

Mr. Buzzby did not even notice his visitor's neck, which glistened and was as thin as a bean-pole, nor the small round scaly head that bobbed and nodded ominously. He saw only the hideous back, and the unbelievably awesome crown. The crown shed a fiery radiance upon the reddish tiles of the dim, vast hall, and the starkly nude body twisted and turned and writhed shockingly.

Black horror clutched at Mr. Buzzby's throat, and his lips trembled as though he were about to cry out. But he spoke no word. He had staggered back against the wall and was making curious futile gestures with his arms, as though he sought to embrace the darkness, to wrap the darkness in the hall about him, to make himself as inconspicuous as possible and invisible to the thing that was bending over the case. But apparently he soon found to his infinite dismay that the thing was aware of his presence, and as it turned slowly toward him he made no further attempt to obliterate himself, but went down on his knees and screamed and screamed and screamed.

Silently the figure advanced toward him. It seemed to glide rather than to walk, and in its terribly lean arms it held a queer assortment of brilliant scarlet bones. And it cackled loathsomely as it advanced.

And then it was that Mr. Buzzby's sanity departed utterly. He groveled and gibbered and dragged himself along the floor like a man in the grip of an instantaneous catalepsy. And all the while he murmured incoherently about how spotless he was and would Osiris spare him and how he longed to reconcile himself with Osiris.

But the figure, when it got to him, merely stooped and breathed on him. Three times it breathed on his ashen face and one could almost see the face shrivel and blacken beneath its warm breath. For some time it remained in a stooping posture, glaring glassily, and when it arose Mr. Buzzby made no effort to detain it. Holding the scarlet bones very firmly in its horribly thin arms it glided rapidly away in the direction of the stairs. The attendants did not see it descend. No one ever saw it again.

And when the coroner, arriving in response to the tardy summons of an attendant, examined Mr. Buzzby's body, the conclusion was unavoidable that the curator had been dead for a long, long time.

A Brief, Strange Story

THE PHANTOMS OF THE FIRE

By CLARK ASHTON SMITH

IT WAS late summer, and the Georgetown road was deep with dust, which had settled like a dun pall on the bordering chaparral and pines. Since he had walked all the way from Auburn without securing a single lift, the man who was trudging along the road with the broiling afternoon sun on his back was hardly less dusty than the trees. He paused now and then to mop his face with a discolored handkerchief, or to peer rather wistfully at the occasional cars which passed him without offering to stop. His clothing, though not actually ragged, was old and worn, and had the indescribable shapelessness of clothing that has been slept in. He was very thin, stoop-shouldered, and discouraged-looking; his general aspect was almost that of a professional tramp; and the people of the countryside were suspicious of tramps.

"Well, I guess I'll have t' walk all the way," he said to himself, whining a little even in his thoughts. "But it ain't much further now. . . . Gosh, but things is hot an' dry." He looked about him at the familiar landscape of parched grass, brushwood and yellow pines with an appraising eye. "Wonder there ain't been more fires—there alluz is at this time o' year."

The man was Jonas McGillicuddy, and he was on his way home after a somewhat prolonged absence. His return was unannounced, and would prove as unexpected to his wife and three children as

his departure had been. Tired of trying to extort a living from a small vineyard and pear-orchard of rocky El Dorado land, and tired also of the perennial nagging of his frail, sensitive-nerved and sorely disappointed wife, Jonas had left abruptly, three years before, after a quarrel of more than customary bitterness and acerbity with his helpmate. Since then, he had heard nothing from his family, for the good and sufficient reason that he had not sought to communicate with them. His various attempts to earn a livelihood had proved scarcely more successful than the fruit-ranching venture, and he had drifted aimlessly and ineffectually from place to place, from situation to situation—a forlorn and increasingly desperate figure. For a man of such shifting, unstable temperament, when all else had failed him, and he had wearied of the hopeless struggle, it was not unnatural to think of returning. Time had softened his memory of his wife's undependable temper, of her shrewish outbursts; but he had not forgotten her motherly ways when she was in a more tractable humor, nor her excellent cooking.

Now, with empty pockets, since his last money had sufficed merely to pay his train-fare to Sacramento, Jonas was nearing the hills in which lay his forest-surrounded ranch beyond Georgetown. The country through which he tramped was sparsely peopled, and there were great stretches of softly rolling hills and low valleys that had not known the touch of cultivation. The ranches were often quite isolated. Beyond all, in the hazy blue of the distance, were the vague and spectral snows of the Sierras.

"Gosh, but one of Matilda's pear pies'll taste good," thought the wanderer. His mouth began to water. He was not reflective enough, however, to wonder just what his reception would be, beyond an uneasy surmise that Matilda might give him a terrific scolding for his absence. "But mebbe she'll be mighty glad t' see me, after all," he consoled himself. Then he tried to picture his children, the five-year old boy and the girl-babies of three and two respectively whom he had last seen.

"Guess they'll have forgotten they had a papa," he mused. The afternoon had been utterly still and airless, with a sultry brooding in its silence. Now, from the northeast, along the road he was travelling, there came a gust of wind, and with it the unmistakable acrid odor of burnt grass and trees.

"Hell, there has been a fire after all," muttered Jonas, with an uneasy start. He peered anxiously ahead, but could see no smoke above the dun and gray-green hills. "Guess it's all out now, anyway."

He came to the top of the low slope he was climbing, and saw before him the burnt area, which lay on both sides of the road and was of indeterminable extent. The brown foliage of heat-seared oaks and the black skeletons of bushes and pines were everywhere. A few fallen logs and old stumps were still smoking a little, as is their wont for days after the extinguishment of a forest fire. It was a scene of complete and irremediable desolation.

Jonas hurried on, with a sense of growing panic, for he was now little more than a mile from his own property. He thought of the yellow pines that stood so close and tall about his cabin—the pines which he had wished to fell, but had spared at the earnest solicitation of the nature-loving Matilda.

"They're so pretty, Jonas," she had said, pleadingly. "I just can't see them go."

"Hope the fire didn't get into them pines," thought Jonas now. "Gosh, but I wish I'd cut 'em down when I wuz

plannin' to. It would have been a lot safer; and I'd have had the money for the wood, too."

The road was strewn in places with ashen leaves, with the charcoal of fallen brands, and several trees had crashed across it, but had now been removed to permit the passage of traffic. It was hotter than ever, in this charred and blackened waste, for the brief gust of wind had fallen. The dust on Jonas' cheeks was runneled with sweat which he no longer paused to wipe away. Irresponsible as he was, a strange gravity had come over the wastrel, and he felt an ever-deepening premonition of calamity.

He came at last to the little by-road which turned off to his ranch from the Georgetown highway. Here, he found with a sinking heart, the fire had also been, and had left nothing but devastation. In spite of his fatigue, he almost ran, with long, shambling steps, and rounding a turn in the by-road, saw that the fire had stopped at the very verge of his own property. The hillside orchard of stunted pear trees, the straggling vines of Mission and Muscat grapes, were quite as he remembered them; and beyond, in the grove of yellow pines, he could see the wreathing smoke that arose from the chimney of his cabin. Panting heavily, he paused, with a sense of relief and thanksgiving as poignant as anything of which his dulled heart was capable.

The sun had almost touched the horizon, as he climbed the winding road through the orchard and entered the grove above. Aisles of light perceptibly tinged with gold lay between the elongated shadows. Even to the sodden, insensitive Jonas, the beauty of the woodland scene, the magic of the sunset, the high, solemn, dark-green pines and the rich glow sifting among them on manzanita-bushes and beds of brown needles, were not without their charm. He drew a long breath, inhaling the clean balsams that the hot sun had drawn from the forest, and feeling as he did so a vague pleasure.

Now he could see his cabin, a long, four-roomed shack of plain, unpainted boards and weather-darkened shingles. A woman in calico was standing in front of the steps. Two little girls were beside her, and he wondered as to the whereabouts of the boy, who had been a fragile youngster, always ailing and fretful. "Mebbe Bill is sick agin," mused Jonas. He was very glad to be home, but he felt a little doubtful, a trifle tremulous, as to the greeting he would receive from Matilda.

The woman looked up as he approached, shading her eyes with her hand from the last rays of the sun, which fell horizontally through the wood. He could see her apron, which was quite clean, as always, though worn and faded from many washings, like her dress. She did not seem to perceive him, but was apparently staring with great intentness at something among the trees. The children also stared, and huddled closer to her, clinging to the hem of her gown.

Jonas tried to call out: "Hello, Matilda," but his throat was so dry and dusty that the words were no more than a hoarse whisper. He started to clear his throat, but the simple act was never finished, for at that moment, the whole scene before him, the trees, the cabin, the woman and the children, were lost in a roaring sheet of ruddy flame that seemed to come from all sides at once and blot out the entire world and the very sky as it towered full-grown in what could have been no more than the fraction of a second. A blast of intolerable heat, fierce as the breath of a thousand furnaces, blew in Jonas' face and swept him backward like a hurricane. The mighty roaring pounded in his ears like a sea, and was

mingled with human screams, as he went down into pitch-black gulfs of unconsciousness.

IT WAS day when Jonas awoke, but he was too confused for a few instants to realize that the light was slanting through the tree-tops from a different direction, or that there was more of it than seemed normal in an evergreen forest. When his wits returned sufficiently to permit the comprehension of the fact that it was morning, he began to notice other things that were equally singular. He found that he was lying on his back among burnt needles, and above him towered the dark boles of fire-swept trees with the pitiful stumps of their cauterized branches. Darkly, indistinctly, in a sort of dull astonishment, he began to remember the events of the previous day, his return at sunset to the cabin, his glimpse of Matilda and the two children, and the all-engulfing sheet of flame. He looked instinctively at his clothes, with the feeling that he must have been badly burnt; but there was no trace of fire on his raiment, and the black ashes about him were cold. Nor, when he reared himself on his elbow and peered around, was there the faintest thread of smoke to indicate a recent conflagration.

He arose and stepped toward the place where the cabin had stood. It was a heap of ashes, from which protruded the ends of charred beams.

"My God!" muttered Jonas. He felt utterly dazed, and his thoughts refused to aline themselves, failing to form any sort of intelligible order.

As Jonas spoke, a man arose from where he had been stooping behind the wreckage of the cabin, furtively dropping some object which he held in his hands. Seeing Jonas, the man came forward hastily. He was a gaunt individual in dirty overalls, with the profile and the general air of a somewhat elderly and dilapidated buzzard. Jonas recognized him as Samuel Slocum, one of his neighbors.

"Wal, Jonas McGillicuddy, so you've come back," explained this individual in raucous tones of unfeigned surprize. "Ye're a little too late, though," he went on, without pausing to let Jonas speak. "Everythin' burnt up clean, four days ago."

"But the cabin wuz here las' night," stammered Jonas. "I came through the woods 'bout sunset, an' I saw Matilda an' the children in front o' the steps, jus' as plain as I see you. Then everythin' seemed to go up in a burst o' flame, an' I didn't know nothin' till I woke up jus' now."

"Ye're crazy, Jonas," assured the neighbor. "There weren't no cabin here las' night, an' no Matildy an' no children, neither. They wuz all burnt up, along with the rest o' the countery hereabouts. We heerd yer wife an' babies a-screamin', but the fire wuz all aroun' before ye could say Jack Robinson, an' the trees fell across yer road, an' no one could git in an' no one could git out. . . . I alluz told ye, Jonas, t' cut them yeller pines down.

"My folks wuz all burnt up?" faltered Jonas.

"Wal, yer little boy died a year ago, so they wuz jus' Matildy an' the two gals."

EARTHWORMS of KARMA

by Lon Dexter

"He grasped the rope before the noose had tightened upon him."

The Story Thus Far

LANDING safely on the planet Mars after a voyage from Earth, Professor Hervy and his daughter Ruth send Joseph Kiser, the third member of their party, to reconnoiter the Martian city which lies across the canal. Kiser is captured by Kabo, a Martian scientist, who transplants Kiser's pineal gland into the brain of a "marb", one of a race of submen who live on Mars. Kiser's memory is thus transferred to the body of a marb, and the marb's intelligence is transferred to Kiser's body. Professor Hervy and Ruth are hospitably received by the Martians, who know nothing of Kabo's perfidy. Nebond, the marb whose intelligence has been transplanted into Kiser's body, abducts Ruth and carries her into the forest where the rest of the marbs live. Kabo's niece, Delam Oblene, learns of Kabo's terrible experiment, and he transplants her intelligence into the body of a female marb to prevent her informing the Council of his deed. She and Kiser, in the bodies of the two marbs, are then marooned on Phobus, one of the moons of Mars.

13. A Phobian Tribunal

THE realization that the female marb marooned with him upon the desolate Martian satellite was none other than the beautiful Delam Oblene and that on his account she had been transformed by her heartless uncle into a grotesque beast caused Kiser a distinct thrill of apprehension regarding her probable danger at the hands of the Rescue-men—or the Phobians, as they might more properly be called.

Where had she found shelter from the ravages of the weather? How had she avoided the very apparent wrath of the Phobians? What might they not attempt to do to her now that she had been the means of their failure in their attack upon him?

Kiser opened the door of his cabin and strode out once more, intent upon finding Delam Oblene and attempting to reach some understanding with her. He must assist her to provide a shelter for herself, and it had best be near his own for their mutual protection.

The rain had ceased and he walked at once to the shore of the lava lake. Here he found no trace of her whom he sought, although he walked for some distance back and forth along the margin of the forest calling her name.

When he had explored as far as he thought she might have ventured and was on the verge of turning back toward his cabin, he heard a slight noise above him and glanced up just in time to see one of the Phobians cast a lariat which sailed with unerring precision and settled about his neck.

Having seen it coming, he grasped the rope before the noose had tightened upon him, and with a quick pull, which took his adversary completely by surprize, he dislodged the fellow from his footing in the tree and stretched him sprawling and wounded upon the ground near by.

There was a severe cut on the creature's arm, which was bleeding profusely. Kiser bound it with strips cut from his own tunic, as the Phobian's clothing was of skins and would not serve his purpose.

This task was performed while the wounded Phobian lay helpless but quite conscious, and he gazed at Kiser without any show of emotion whatsoever.

When he had finished bandaging the wound, Kiser placed the Phobian in as comfortable a position as possible, added the rope to his equipment, and went back to his cabin to spend a restless night of anxiety regarding Delam Oblene, regreting her fearful misfortune inflicted because of her attempt to intercede in his behalf, and fearing lest she might suffer from exposure or attack.

He pictured the horror of her position, a refined, beautiful and highly intellectual maiden forced to occupy the physical body of a horrid marb whose brain was so constructed as to limit her mental activity. She could not communicate with her friends by means of telepathy because the brain-mechanism by means of which that wonderful feat was accomplished by the Martians was lacking in the marb; neither could she remember her previous incarnations, except probably such experiences as she might have happened to discuss during her existence as a Martian.

Early the next morning he renewed his quest and again he failed to find any trace of her near the lava lake. He called her name often and loudly but to no avail.

He berated himself for not having guessed her identity from the first. She had as good as told him that she was Delam Oblene and yet for many days he had been blinded to the truth.

KISER had ventured some distance into the forest and for some time he had not called out. Suddenly he heard voices; he stopped to listen. There could be no mistake; it was the jumbled and distant sound of conversation.

He drew cautiously nearer until he came upon the opening of a cave. This opening was guarded by one of the Phobians who appeared to have been placed there as a sentinel, and he dared not approach too near.

Crouching behind the verdure in an effort to see and yet remain unseen, he suddenly felt a paroxysm of severe pain in his hand, which almost caused him to cry out. Upon investigation he found that he had touched another of the numerous "nettle trees" such as the one he had encountered upon that first day upon the satellite. This one was much larger,

however, and was loaded with large yellow fruit resembling the tomato. This was the terrible "tear gas fruit" with which the Phobians had meant to serenade him in his cabin!

He plucked several of these "tear-gas tomatoes," as he chose to name them, and placed them in a near-by spot for his own convenience in case he might need them.

Presently another of the Phobians came to the opening of the cave and held a brief conversation with the sentinel. He spoke in a commanding tone and pointed in the direction of the lava lake. Evidently he was one in authority, for the sentinel at once set out in the direction indicated and the other disappeared inside the cave.

The rendezvous of the Phobians was left unguarded; should he attempt to go closer? He did not know when the former sentinel might return nor that another might not be sent from within to replace him, but after some moments his curiosity overcame his caution, and filling his pockets with tear tomatoes, he crept forward to the entrance of the cave and stepped inside.

There was a high narrow tunnel extending back some ten feet, where it opened into a large amphitheater with many ledges or seats rising in terrace fashion from the center toward all four sides. These seats appeared to have been hewn out of solid stone; they were about twenty inches wide, each being some two feet above the next one in front, with gradually sloping aisles approaching each of the four corners, the widest narrowing into the exit in which he stood, and upon these seats were about forty of the savage Phobians conducting what appeared to be some form of tribunal.

The amphitheater was well lighted by means of great luminous balls of some phosphorescent substance suspended from overhead; and seated in the ten-foot square of level floor in the center of the chamber, her hands securely bound and a blind placed about her eyes, was the grotesque marb which he now felt so certain was Delam Oblene, while at either side of her stood one of the gross Phobians and each was talking in loud, quarrelsome tones. They gesticulated and pounded themselves on their chests until the enclosed amphitheater fairly reverberated with the echo. They were undoubtedly engaged in a heated argument, though what the point of contention was Kiser could not guess. They both talked at once, and yet, somehow, their listeners appeared to have no difficulty on this account and they seemed to understand.

At sight of Delam Oblene's plight a cold rage filled Kiser's heart. He clutched the largest of the tear tomatoes and, forgetful of its probable effect upon Delam Oblene, threw it with all his strength, dashing it to fragments upon the face of one of the orators. Then before anyone knew what had happened he dealt the other a like blow upon his chest.

There was a howl of pain from both victims of his marksmanship and both went down with hands to eyes, while others scampered back in an effort to escape the pungent fumes which were now permeating the air.

Now thoroughly aroused to action, Kiser dashed another of the miniature gas bombs into the face of still another of the creatures who had gained the entrance to the tunnel and sent him screeching back into the arms of those behind him.

The din inside the amphitheater now became an uproar of screaming, coughing and the shuffling of many feet, for the Phobians wore heavy wooden shoes. Not wishing to injure the marb whom he sought to rescue, Kiser now withheld his

rain of vegetable gas bombs but stood threateningly guarding the entrance of the cave.

But Kiser had reckoned without consideration for the skill of the Phobians with the lariat, and even in the narrow confines of the tunnel he soon found himself neatly lassoed. He was dragged forward into the gas-filled chamber, where he was thrown rudely to the floor and securely bound.

As he entered the amphitheater the irritating gas from his bombardment filled his eyes and nostrils and he strangled and went temporarily blind, but not before he had seen that all the Phobians remaining in the chamber wore a rude appliance over their faces and that the huge marb whom he believed to be Delam Oblene lay in the center of the amphitheater apparently unconscious. The Phobians had hurriedly procured their gas masks, donned them, and were protected from his attack—the only ones he had injured were the three whom he struck and Delam Oblene, if indeed this animal were she.

Kiser suffered untold agonies before he was again able to open his eyes, and then, as he glanced about him, he saw several of the Phobians spraying some sort of fluid into the atmosphere of the room, presumably to annul the effects of the tear fruit. The other marb was beginning to awake and several of the Phobians had removed their gas masks. The three whom he had injured had apparently been carried out, for they were nowhere to be seen, but the others began to gather about them when it was seen that they were fully conscious.

Just what was going to happen to them—or at any rate to Kiser—there could be but little doubt, for these strange creatures began to clamor for vengeance and many of them had unsheathed their knives while he lay bound and quite helpless. And had it not been so it could have made but little difference; for when he felt the strength of the creature who had so easily tossed him upon the floor he knew that, even had he had his Earthly sinews, he would have been no match for one of these Phobians.

As the howling crowd grew closer and more clamorous the same Phobian whom Kiser had encountered upon the margin of the lava lake stepped into the amphitheater. Instantly all noise was hushed and each of the savage creatures stepped back with an air of deference.

He walked with a slight limp and he still wore the dressing which Kiser had placed upon his arm. When this creature unsheathed his long knife Kiser thought surely that his time to die had come indeed, but the Phobian stooped, cut the rope which bound Kiser's hands and feet, and assisted him to his feet!

The other marb was dealt with in like manner and the two were then conducted to the exit of the cave and released, apparently with the assurance that they would not be further molested.

Whatever else might be said of the Phobians it was certain that this one, who appeared to be one in authority, was not without gratitude and appreciation.

By means of gestures and much argument Kiser prevailed upon the huge marb to start the erection of a cabin like his own a few paces from it.

14. Pilluth Learns

BOTH Anhul Pilluth and Frambrozo Himnun had been suitors for the hand of Delam Oblene, but, being a highly skilled microscopist and having mapped out a career for herself, she had rejected both and given her undivided attention to her work.

Pilluth had spent three years, since his graduation from the university, as Kabo's

assistant, and this training had developed him into a worthy scientist and entitled him to a commission from the Council for the asking. Yet he had not meant to make application for a commission had Kabo's niece not suddenly left Keto. Or, at any rate, Pilluth was informed that she had been permanently removed to Norb during one of his short vacations.

This caused the younger man to alter his plans and he at once made application for a commission, and on the very day that he received it came the news of Delam Oblene's death and the arrival of her ashes from Norb.

As cremation was compulsory and must be done before a corpse may be shipped, no one questioned the identity of the ashes in the urn and both of the lovers mourned Delam Oblene as lost without entertaining the remotest idea that there might have been foul play.

True, both Pilluth and Himnun had attempted to communicate with her after her departure from Keto and had been unable to do so. This was very perplexing and they wondered, but neither made any effort to investigate; and when the news of her death was received both silently conceded that she was probably ill and the seeming discrepancy was all but forgotten.

Pilluth had made arrangements to open a laboratory of his own under his commission but deferred his arrangements to move until after the interment, and on the heels of this incident came Nebond's escape from his hovel and the consequent report that the missing man had been discovered and lost again, which served to remind Pilluth of the fearful injustice which had been done and sent him to visit Kabo. After having expressed his gratitude and appreciation for the guidance and advice he had received at the hands of the older man he said, "Regarding this Earthman whom we so grossly wronged, is there not some means by which we might restore him? That is a thing I do not wish to weigh upon my conscience; let us extract a promise from him that he will not reveal our duplicity and restore him to his rightful body. He would most certainly be more than willing to bargain for restoration."

"That, my friend is impossible. You have no conception of the malice borne us by that degenerate. Restored to his Earth-body with its enormous strength he would wreak upon us the most terrible vengeance his puny mentality could conceive. No, I regret the incident as much as you but it can not be adjusted now."

"But do you not think he would bargain with us for his release? He must realize by now how helpless he is."

"Bargain indeed! Yes, he would bargain with us! And what means the promise of an Earthling?"

"You are unduly embittered against everything pertaining to the Earth. Remember that you and I are but a single step in evolution above the Earthlings. But a comparatively short time ago you yourself were an Earthling, and I dare say less well developed than this one; if I am any judge this Earthman can be trusted."

"Pardon me, my dear Pilluth, but there is much that you forget. There are no Earthlings that may be trusted. Is it not their untrustworthiness that plunges them into the throes of misery? Look at their greed! Loook at their deceit! Look at their sensuality! Why, a man devoid of these traits of character could not live half a year upon the Earth! During my own Earth life I was the same as the others; I was taught these cursed traits of character from infancy to my so-called death, and I cheated, lied, swindled, and hated as the Earthlings must ever do. No, his word could not be trusted. We have him in our power now and we must

keep him so. Had you understood English and heard the vindictive threats he made against us the day we visited him in his bed you would not be so generously inclined. The men of Earth live only for greed, and vengeance."

"But, sir, on Masovada we presume to have no such traits; here none are so vile save you and me—for are we not deceiving the Council of Masovada? Are we not cowards, that we hide behind this poor unfortunate's misfortune to save ourselves from the wrath of our fellow men? Was it not greed for scientific knowledge that prompted us to commit this crime in the first place?"

"Alas, Pilluth, you speak truly and well. All of these facts I have pondered in remorse of soul; in agony of soul I sorrow that this thing has gone beyond the possibility of reparation, but it is so. It is all honor to you, Pilluth, that you wish to right this wrong, but it can not be. To restore these two would be our ruin—my death, and disgrace for you forever!"

"Why do you say these two?" Pilluth was gazing into the other's eyes as if to read his innermost thoughts.

"Nebond has been wronged equally with the Earthling," quickly responded Kabo, his face going deadly pale. How much had Pilluth read of that which had involuntarily flashed into his mind?

Without further argument the young man took leave of his preceptor and went to his room to pack his belongings preparatory to going away. When he had finished this task, something prompted him to take one last look about the grounds. He was not satisfied with Kabo's answer to his request that the Earthling be restored, and he desired to see once more the horrible result of the double operation; so he strolled alone about the enclosure reviewing the results of various experiments and making some notes regarding each.

He visited the hovel where Nebond was confined, but nowhere could he find the marb bearing the personality of Joseph Kiser. He searched the entire garden until no portion remained save the isolated hovel where Kabo had conducted his private laboratory and whither all others were forbidden to go.

Pilluth hesitated to approach this building for two reasons: first, he had always respected Kabo's wishes in this respect and was inclined to do so now; and second, he feared that Kabo might see him. The remembrance of the look on Kabo's face, however, when he had made what Pilluth was sure was an unintentional remark, spurred him on and he determined to investigate and, if the Earthman could speak German, to have a talk with him. Too, he felt that he had a right at least to converse with the Earthling if it were possible to do so; for was he not equally guilty of the crime? Kabo had been betrayed while he had lived upon the Earth, and he was unduly and unjustly embittered against the Earth and its inhabitants. Pilluth wanted to learn what terms the Earthman would agree to.

Reaching the door of the small building, he knocked. For a moment there was no response, and he knocked a second time. From within came a querulous protest in the accents of a marb, but the pitch of the voice was that of a human being, and a Martian female at that! "Why do you come knocking? It is not yet time for my food, and if it were why do you not fetch it to the slot instead of disturbing my sleep at this hour? Go away. I do not want the food you fetch me anyhow; you refuse me the herbs and worms I desire and force upon me your own rotten food. Why don't you bring me the kind of food I want? If you would please me, fetch worms — fetch worms!"

For a moment Pilluth stood as if stunned. What Martian woman had Kabo performed his terrible experiment upon? He knew this was not Kiser, for this creature had spoken the Martian language; and again, the voice had been unmistakably feminine. What could the answer be? Nebond he had seen already!

Pilluth got a large stone, hastily broke the lock on the door, and, forgetful of any danger to himself, swung the heavy portal wide. One look inside and he uttered a cry of horrified amazement; for, slouched ungracefully upon a crude bed at the opposite side of the small room, lay Delam Oblene!

Blinking at the unaccustomed light which had suddenly flooded her dismal chamber, she stared at the astonished Pilluth without the slightest sign of recognition; although she was more than half naked there was no sign of confusion in her manner, nothing of intelligence in her eye. At length, as he continued to stare at her in utter amazement, she bared her teeth and growled!

At this Pilluth recoiled as from a blow in the face; then with arms outstretched he stepped toward her. "My darling! Kabo told me you were dead—what—what—don't you know me, Delam Oblene?" He attempted to take her hand and she snatched it away; then with a vicious snarl she bent forward and her teeth snapped together with great force, barely missing his outstretched hand as he recoiled with horror against the half-open door.

"How—how can you act like that? Don't you know me, Delam Oblene?"

"That is not my name! I am Juak. Now I am going to run amuck! I shall kill you if you do not stand aside!"

"No, you are not Juak! You are mad! Of course you are not Juak; you are Delam Oblene, and you can not kill me because I am stronger than you. Why has Kabo imprisoned you here until he has undermined your reason? Come, pull yourself together now and think!"

"I tell you I am Juak! I am going to run amuck now! I will—will—no, no, it's no use! I have lost all my strength! Kabo has changed me into a weak thing that can not even have an occasional amuck. Look at my arms! White! And so small! What are they good for? Look at my legs!" She displayed unblushingly a very shapely pair of limbs. "They are too long and too small and too white! My body looks as though it had been shaved! Kabo has spoiled me, and if I only had the strength to run amuck I would kill you first and then kill Kabo."

In his surprize at seeing Delam Oblene, Pilluth had forgotten for the moment about Kabo and his soul-transference; now he remembered and suddenly the realization of the terrible truth came to him: Kabo had performed his hideous operation upon Delam Oblene and had thus transferred her mentality to the body of a marb! This creature with which he was conversing was Juak, a female marb which had possession of Delam Oblene's body!

His feeling as this realization came to him was, at first, a sense of dreadful sickening horror; his hands shook, his lips trembled, and something seemed to rise up in his throat as if to choke him. This feeling rapidly gave way to intense anger toward the heartless perpetrator of the infamous deed. For this outrage Kabo must be punished—swiftly, surely, and terribly. He must be made to suffer even as Delam Oblene had suffered — but where was the real Delam Oblene?

"My God!" wailed Pilluth. "The heartless, infamous, damnable brute! I had not dreamed that anyone could be so base! Never before in all my Masovadan experience have I undertaken to avenge myself upon any living creature, but this

is too much! He shall pay! By God, he shall pay!"

Juak was watching him with amusement. "You will run amuck?" she asked with delight. "You will kill Kabo?"

Anhul Pilluth looked pityingly at the creature and a great sob rose in his throat. The superb form, the delicate pink skin was that of the maiden he had loved, but from her eye now shone only the intelligence of Juak the filthy female marb! His hurt was too great to express in words, so he did not speak, but just stared at her in mute, dumfounded anguish. His feelings mingled tenderness, pity, and horror for this creature who was and yet who was not Delam Oblene and an intense resentment toward Kabo who was the author of her present predicament. His thoughts flew back to the Delam Oblene he had known as he continued to stare at this creature before him and with the refinement, the maidenly modesty, and the simple sweetness of the one compared the lowly, sloven, unkempt baseness of the other, and his blood seemed to freeze within him as he recalled her words: "Worms! Worms, fetch worms!"

It was a thoroughly aroused Pilluth who strode out of Juak's shanty, repaired the broken lock, and fastened the door. He could as yet formulate no definite plan of action, however, for he had no idea where Kabo had hidden the other two victims of his perfidy — the marb forms of Delam Oblene and Joseph Kiser. His first thought was to rush at once to Kabo and demand an explanation, but, on second thought, he rejected this plan; for he reasoned that such a course of action would only serve to warn Kabo that his crime against his niece had been discovered and thus put him on his guard and perhaps stimulate him to further attempt at crime. He would demand an explanation of Kabo only as a last resort to find the imprisoned souls of Delam Oblene and the Earthman.

14. Beck Protests

SINCE there were none in the tribe who might mate with Beck and since Beck was too old to forage successfully in other tribes for a mate and lacked the courage to protest with the conquerer of the mighty Pleck for having purloined Pike, this surly marb looked with favor upon Ruth. Of course Beck knew that she had none of the charm and rare beauty so manifest in his lost Pike, but even such a hollow-eyed, pink-skinned female as she would probably be better than no mate at all; for, to be sure, someone must provide his food for him. Beck was proud and he knew the other marbs would taunt and tease, but also he had a vigorous appetite and he was very lazy; rather than forage for himself he must put his pride aside, for would they not taunt anyhow should he start providing for himself?

He approached Ruth with his most affectionate growl, which was also his most commanding, for he was not aware of her participation in the fight with Pleck. "Come to me, you imp of perdition!" he said affectionately. "You are not much to look upon, but if you provide for me well perhaps I shall not beat you except when I run amuck."

When Ruth drew back he growled even more fiercely. "Do not anger me further!" he roared. "Is it not enough that I must accept you at all? Come!"

But she did not come, and Beck began to foam at the mouth, while the tribe crowded about to see the fun. And the pending encounter promised to be very interesting, too, for had not this strange female all but bested Pleck? But the slothful Beck did not know this.

Ruth had backed away from him and stood trembling, although she must have

known that she possessed far greater physical strength than the best of them, while Nebond stood regarding them with the air of a disinterested onlooker.

The beast was greatly surprized and angered when Ruth evaded his first charge and gave him a shove which sent him staggering many steps backward while the other marbs taunted him with delight.

He charged at her again and with renewed fury, but when his long arm shot toward her she lightly stepped aside, and seizing his arm with both her hands, she deftly attempted to bend it the wrong way—as she had seen Kiser do upon that memorable day of their landing.

Beck uttered a hoarse scream of anguish and drew back, nursing the wounded member and glaring at Ruth with intense hatred. The marbs taunted him with frantic glee, dancing and hopping about in their delight with shrill sounds which very nearly approximated laughter, but Beck had had enough of the affray; so he slunk away into the forest muttering and grimacing in his rage and discomfiture.

Nor did he stop at the canal shore. He plunged into the water and swam across into the city of Keto. There he hailed the first Martian he saw and requested that he communicate with the chief of the Council in behalf of the unfortunate tribe of marbs who had been invaded by a strange being with sunken eyes and such savage strength that many of them had been killed and the others subjected to much oppression.

From Beck's account of the situation it was at once recognized that the mad Earthman was among them, and Frambrozo Himnun was notified.

Very soon Himnun, Professor Hervy and Unel Kabo were on the scene, and after questioning the marb at some length the three armed themselves with a Strotan Ray machine and kandiked to the habitat of Pleck's—or rather, Nebond's tribe.

Here they found the marbs lounging about in the sunshine, seemingly quite well content with the new order of things. The dead had been disposed of by being thrown into a deep crevice, and none appeared to resent the intrusion into their midst of a creature of strange form who had wrought such havoc among them but a few hours before.

Nebond lolled among them as lazy, as dirty, and quite as loathsome with his unwashed, blood-stained hands as were the others, but Ruth was nowhere to be seen.

As the kandike landed near them, Nebond arose and approached them. When he had drawn quite near he stopped and began pounding his chest with his fists.

Kabo's face went dead white when this creature addressed them in the Martian tongue: "I am Nebond and Nebond does not fear the Masovadans. If you attempt to take Nebond back into captivity Nebond will kill all of you! Nebond is very strong; far stronger than any other marb that ever lived, and you had best leave Nebond alone! Go now, before I run amuck and kill the three of you! Nebond and his tribe will suffer no interference from the Masovadan Council!"

Without further ado Kabo brought the Strotan Ray machine into play and Nebond fell limp and inert to the ground even as he started to charge them in the frightful amuck of a Martian marb.

"The Earthman has been among the marbs all the while; I wonder why they have not reported his presence," said Kabo as he approached the slowly retreating colony of marbs.

"Where is the girl he brought into the forest with him?" asked Himnun of one of the beasts who had not bolted into the forest when Nebond fell.

"She left the tribe as soon as she had

bested Beck," replied the marb. "She went in that direction"—he pointed east, then nodded toward the inert form of Nebond—"and *he* forbade any of us to follow her. He said she was a dangerous *she* and had best be allowed to go where she chose."

"Has this creature been with you before?" asked Himnun.

"We never saw him nor his like before today. He came to us claiming that he was Nebond who was taken into captivity many many small-moons ago for having run amuck and injured a Masovadan; but he is not Nebond—he is not even a marb, as you can see. But fight! You should have seen him slay Pleck and Zib and Liko and Ube and the others of Pleck's family! It was very amusing!"

"Undoubtedly you enjoyed it immensely, but now we must find the girl. Who is the leader of this tribe now?"

"Who else, Honorable Councilor, but Lune? Lune is the greatest of all the marbs and, had this misshapen creature not appeared I should have killed Pleck myself before another small-moon had passed. I, Lune, am now king of the marbs."

"Nay!" roared another of the beasts who stood listening; "Lune is a fool! It is I, Bike, who shall be king of the marbs; if it becomes necessary I shall kill Lune, for he shall not stand between me and my right!"

"Away into the forest and find the girl!" commanded Himnun. "The marb who finds her shall be king of the others and the Council shall stand with him for six small-moons; if he can not maintain his authority after that, why, then he must fall. Now go."

The remaining marbs scurried away in search of Ruth, and they sought in a way known only to the animals of lower order.

Himnun and Professor Hervy remained on the scene to await the results of the quest while Kabo kandiked the inert form of Nebond back to captivity.

Even before Kabo returned for them the ambitious Lune returned triumphant, with Ruth walking a few paces behind him, and when she saw them she hurried forward and flung herself sobbing upon her father's breast.

"Oh, Dad! This has been such a horrible experience! Dad, I actually had to fight them with my hands—and Joseph is so terrible!"

"It is all right now, my dear," soothed her father; "we have found you and Joseph is in the skilled hands of Dr. Kabo."

"No, no, Dad; I fear that he will never recover. Oh, if you had seen the terrible things he did you would realize that recovery for him is impossible. He is a beast! And he doesn't appear to have any human characteristics left at all! Dad, what *could* have happened to have changed him so?"

16. A Discovery

ALTHOUGH the Martian language would have been much easier for Kiser to learn than English for Delam Oblene, yet she learned English very quickly because there lurked in her subconscious memory a subdued knowledge of the language, just as a genius is one who in some previous life has acquired some proficiency in the line in which he is now so expert and consequently draws involuntarily upon this subconscious store of knowledge; and within a short time the two could converse without difficulty.

The great soul of Delam Oblene could function but poorly through the undeveloped brain of Juak, and yet it is the soul which matters most; for Juak with the highly developed brain and beautiful body of Delam Oblene was quite as lowly and base as she had been before. She

could no more make use of the brain cells which were now at her disposal than Delam Oblene could properly express herself through the brain and physique of Juak.

Both Kiser and Delam Oblene found it very difficult to concentrate upon any plan for their own deliverance from this horrid predicament, and in their minds there evolved plans for their permanent residence on the satellite and the embryonic idea that they might eventually mate and live quite happily together. And yet there was that infinite something which forbade them yielding to impulse—perhaps a degree of self-control developed by hundreds of years more of experience than the marbs have had.

Delam Oblene could remember her experiences as a Martian but could not recall her previous experiences and was prone to forget recent occurrences very quickly, while Kiser was not so severely handicapped because he had never been able to remember his previous incarnations.

One evening while strolling through the forest Kiser noticed a peculiar glow upon the horizon which reminded him of the Earthly aurora, and though he had no idea how remote the light might be, he elected to make a tour of exploration at least for a short distance in that direction.

After walking less than a mile he came upon what he first thought was another lava lake, until he reflected that the lava lake did not generate light and noted that this brilliant area gave forth no heat.

It was a bright phosphorescent lake several acres in area, which illuminated this portion of the forest with almost dazzling brilliance and outdid the reflected light from Mars in casting dense black shadows back into the surrounding darkness.

With a long stick he poked into the shining mass. It was semi-solid and clung tenaciously to the stick when he pulled it away. The end of the stick glowed brightly and when he touched it with his hand it imparted this property to his fingers.

This was undoubtedly the source of those luminous balls with which the Phobians lighted their cave dwellings; what it was composed of and why it should exist he could not guess, as also he was at a loss to account for the presence of the lava lake upon this small satellite which, because of its small size, should have cooled many thousands of years ago. He had marveled also that the atmosphere should be so much more dense here than on Mars and that the pull of gravity was greater upon this satellite than upon the planet. This last he suspected was due to the centrifugal force of the rapidly revolving satellite and wondered vaguely what might happen to one who might chance to circumnavigate the satellite and attempt to walk on the surface which was always turned away from Mars.

When Kiser noted that the lake imparted its phosphorescent property to the stick an idea began to formulate in his slothful brain; he wondered if the Martians were not quite proficient in astronomy. Since they were possessed of superior knowledge in other sciences, he reasoned that they probably excelled in this also; undoubtedly they had seen this luminous area and might see such luminous figures or characters as he might make if drawn large enough.

He hurriedly sought Delam Oblene to discuss this plan with her. She informed him that they knew of the phosphorescent lake, also that the satellite had a greater gravitational pull due to its centrifugal force and an adequate rainfall, but they had not known of the lava lakes or of any source of internal heat, having taught for

centuries that the satellite was damp, cold, and forbidding.

When he unfolded his plans to write an S O S with the phosphorescent substance she was very enthusiastic and offered her whole-hearted co-operation and help. They set out at once for the lake, and so excited was Kiser over the furtherance of his plan that he set a pace which Delam Oblene found difficulty in matching.

"We will write both our names in large characters, and when the astronomers see our inscription through their telescopes they will deduce that we have been marooned here and take steps to liberate us by means of the *Arrogant*. Imagine Kabo's surprize when he learns that his 'Earthworm' has turned upon him and that his plans have been foiled!"

"I have tried to reason from every possible angle and I can not see wherein there is a chance of failure. Such an inscription as you plan will most assuredly be seen by our astronomers, who will at once broadcast the news, and Frambrozo Himnun will do the rest."

When they reached the shore of the phosphorescent lake Kiser secured a large stick, wrapped one end of it securely with a thick coating of leaves, tied these with grasses, and dipped it into the glowing surface of the lake.

Delam Oblene followed his example but when her stick was ready for use she returned to find Kiser floundering in utter confusion.

"It's no use!" he cried in despair. "It's no use; I can't do it!"

"Why, what is the matter?" Delam Oblene was perplexed.

"I can not remember one single character of script! Nebond was never taught how to write, and he might not have been had they tried, for it seems that the marb brain has no graphic center. I can not write, Delam Oblene! I can not write!"

His despair was pitiable to behold, but Delam Oblene did not cry for the same reason that Kiser did not write. Together they turned and slunk despondently back into the forest.

Kiser spent a sleepless night nursing his recent disappointment and wondering if there might be no way in which they might seek deliverance from their tragic fate. He had not realized the limitation resulting from the possession of a marb's brain, and feared lest he might be overlooking some chance of escape for that reason. Would the things about him look the same if he might look at them with his own eyes? Was there not some avenue of escape which his submerged mentality was unable to grasp? But no; what could be more hopeless than being thus marooned on a satellite several thousand miles from the planet Mars, which was inaccessible to the inhabitants of the planet unless they used the Earth craft, which was extremely unlikely? No, they had not overlooked any possibility because there was nothing to overlook.

Early the next morning he sought Delam Oblene.

"We were greatly disappointed last night at our failure to signal the planet and the experience serves to disillusion us regarding any false hopes of escape from the fate which Kabo has placed upon us," he said. "Perhaps we should make the best of it and try to be happy. Why should we not mate and try to forget our troubles?"

"Do you think there is no hope that we might be discovered by your friend from Earth and taken back to Masovada, where the Council would demand our deliverance at Kabo's hands?"

"Alas, no, there is no further hope. No one dreams that we may be on this satellite, and unless that were suspected it would never occur to them to visit Phobus. But it is not because of the fact that

we may never escape our fate that I wish to mate with you, Delam Oblene; it is because I have learned to care for you very, very much."

"Earthman, I fear to make so important a decision with my present mental equipment! I do not know what to decide; I do not know how I should answer you. Please give me a few days longer to think—or try to think. Perhaps it is best that we attempt to make the best of a bad situation; perhaps it is best that we should mate and try to forget as you say, but do not ask me to decide just now. Sometimes I think that I do love you, Joseph Kiser, and I would go through this experience again to aid you; but I do not know how I should answer you just now. Perhaps tomorrow I shall tell you my answer."

Joseph Kiser reached out a hairy, calloused hand and clasped another larger and even more calloused one, and with a horrid grimace which was intended for a loving smile, he lifted it to his coarse, livid lips. Just then he thought of Ruth. Might she not at this moment be thinking of him? Had she allowed another to replace him in her heart? Had she ceased to love him because of these few months of separation? Kiser could not bring himself to believe that she had.

17. *Pilluth's Dilemma*

HAVING sought in vain for the two victims of Kabo's mania for scientific advancement, Pilluth was forced to confer again with Kabo.

"I have come," he said, struggling to control his emotion, "to make a confession, ask some questions, and demand an adjustment."

"Your confession and your questions, my dear Pilluth, I will hear with pleasure," replied Kabo, "but you should recall that there are but few who may demand anything of Kabo. Other things that you should recall are that as a recently commissioned scientist, your success will depend largely upon my co-operation."

"Be that as it may, you shall hear me and just this once you shall do as I demand. I have seen the creature which you have imprisoned within your gardens who bears the physical body of Delam Oblene. I have not been able to find Delam Oblene herself nor the marb form of the Earthman, but you can do so —and this you are going to do immediately, for I am very impatient to have them restored; in fact, the longer their restoration is delayed the more I am impressed with the conviction that it would be a virtue to murder you with my two hands and suffer the consequences!"

"And just how, may I ask, are you going to enforce your demand? You have confessed that you can not find the two marbs; therefore you can not restore them yourself; you dare not report me to the Council, for you are as guilty of the Earthling's derangement as I; and you will not murder me as you have threatened, for then there would be no one who could tell you where the two whom you seek are hidden. No, Pilluth, as always Kabo holds the winning cards and you are quite as helpless as the fools whom you desire to aid."

"There is one trump, Kabo, on which you failed to reckon." There was a menacing gleam in Pilluth's eyes, and Kabo paled. "That is my physical strength. I shall give you just a taste of it now and repeat it each half-hour in increasing doses until you are brought to realize that I mean business when I tell you that these people must be restored!"

Pilluth caught a firm hold upon Kabo's long slender throat, and when his fingers tightened the Martian's face first reddened and then grew quite purple as his

eyes protruded to their extreme limit and he struggled impotently while Pilluth shook him as though he were a mere infant.

Pilluth retained his self-control, however, and when the other began to relax in his efforts at resistance he released his hold and flung the gasping Kabo back into the chair.

"Perhaps it may not be necessary to repeat that performance," said Pilluth evenly when Kabo had recovered himself somewhat, "but just the same I shall decrease the interval to fifteen minutes and I shall stay here and continue to argue in this manner until you tell me where you have hidden your niece and the Earthman. And remember: if you have killed them, then there is no further reason for my refraining from killing you, as I should like very much to do."

"You fool!" gasped Kabo. "I shall ruin you for this! No, I will not tell you where they are hidden, and you shall rue the day which gave you the idea that you might cross Kabo and prosper!"

Kabo pressed a small button upon his desk and sprang to his feet. At once a door opened behind Pilluth and Nebond stepped into the room.

"Get him, Nebond!" screamed Kabo. "You may run amuck and rend him to your heart's content! Beat him! Kill him if you like; and if you do not you shall have no more food!"

Without hesitation Nebond sprang upon the astonished Pilluth and struck him a mighty blow between the eyes, and the Martian fell limp and inert to the floor without even so much as an effort to defend himself.

After having ascertained that Pilluth still lived, Kabo called an ambulance and had him conveyed to the Emergency House, then went about his duties just as though nothing out of the ordinary had happened. He calmly reported the incident to the Councilor Chief, saying that the Earthman had bolted from his cell and injured Pilluth. "The Earthman is getting very troublesome," he reported; "should we not urge his friends to take him back to Earth as soon as possible? He has such strength that our walls will hardly contain him and sooner or later he is going to kill someone. I shall attend Pilluth personally; perhaps I may be able to save him, but I fear that he is fatally hurt. I seriously doubt that he will ever regain consciousness."

"No," the Councilor Chief informed him, "we do not want the Earthlings to return, nor could they do so if they would until they construct a pump with which to replenish their air supply. If your walls are not strong enough we shall construct stronger walls. Keep him there and do the best you can to restore his reason."

"You are right; the scientist from Earth should not be allowed to return. I will do what may be done for the madman, but I am sure that he is quite incurable. He has lived with some tribe of marbs until he believes himself one of them. He has even forgotten his own language and has acquired the monotonous speech of the marbs. I will report Pilluth's progress from day to day, and if the poor fellow should pass out I shall attend to the details of his cremation."

18. Ruth Decides

FRAMBROZO HIMNUN had respected Ruth's love for Kiser and had said nothing to her of love, but they had been thrown much in each other's company, and since the reported death of Delam Oblene, the Martian had found solace from his bereavement in the companionship of the Earth-girl and they had confided in each other unreservedly until a sort of comradeship had sprung up be-

tween them which amounted to an almost perfect understanding.

And since Ruth's harrowing experience in the Martian forest she could not think of Kiser without a shudder of aversion, yet amid all of this there persisted the memory of him as she had known him in days gone by, and she had never ceased to long for him as he was then. It was as though his soul had been snatched from him; he seemed a man without a soul, a physical remnant of his former self with even the memory of past events gone from him, speaking a different language and fancying himself a beast; this must indeed be a strange sort of mania.

Professor Hervy's new-found interest in the Martian's maiden sister also added to Ruth's loneliness, and when at length Himnun began to talk to her of love she listened willingly. Why should she not wed this wonderful Martian and try to live happily upon Mars? The Martian scientists had told them that the *Arrogant* would probably not be able to make the return voyage and she might never see others of her own kind, and, after all, the Earth life would seem quite crude indeed now, since they had had a taste of the Martian existence.

"We have both had our disappointments in life," Himnun said. "My own hope for happiness seemed dead with the passing of Delam Oblene, but your companionship has revived it. I refrained from speaking until today, when the Councilor Chief informed me that Kabo has no further hope of Joseph Kiser's recovery. Now I must tell you that I love you; we understand one another and I know that we can live happily together. Our physical differences need not matter, and who knows but that Earth blood is just what is needed to remedy our physical imperfections?"

"I hardly know how I should answer you, Himnun. I am sure that I love you and I feel certain that we could live happily together, and yet I feel that I should not desert Joseph Kiser while there might be any hope for his recovery, and perhaps if we might only get him back to Earth and away from this low pressure atmosphere he would recover. I feel that we should try to perfect pumps large enough to replenish our reservoirs. If you think best we will not divulge the fact that we have succeeded in reaching your planet, but I feel that we must attempt to get him back and give him this chance to recover."

"But do you have upon Earth any such scientist as Unel Kabo?"

"Himnun, dear, I do not know why I should feel so, but I do not trust your Unel Kabo. He is *so* repulsive to me, and it seems so strange that poor Joseph should have returned to Kabo's estate that day upon which we discovered him. The path of destruction which he had wrought started from there, too, and the poor boy seemed to have intended stopping there until he chanced to remember that everything about him had been destroyed. Do you suppose it is possible, Himnun, that Kabo may have destroyed his reason?"

"Oh, no, indeed! I am sure that you do Kabo a fearful injustice to even so much as imagine such a thing. Why, he is our Councilor Scientist and highly respected and honored all over Masovada. Why should you distrust Kabo, Ruth?"

"I do not know why, but I do. He does not impress me as an honorable man, and I can not endure his sarcastic attitude. And since he maintains that Joseph is incurable, why should he deny us the privilege of seeing him?"

"I do not know, but I am sure that there is some good reason. Perhaps he fears that it may not be safe; only yesterday the Earthman attacked and probably fatally injured Kabo's former assistant,

Anhul Pilluth. I fear that you have allowed yourself to become unjustly prejudiced, Ruth."

"Perhaps. Perhaps I should feel shame to think as I do regarding your Councilor Scientist, but what has he done to entitle him to the respect and confidence of the people of Mars?"

"He has struggled upward from the rank of a laboratory technician to that of Councilor Scientist by hard work and sheer merit. He is the leader of a certain school of scientific thought which attempts to explain heredity upon the basis of natural selection and the development of brain centers, while the contending element maintains that heredity can be explained by means of natural selection alone. And by natural selection we mean that a soul, upon being incarnated on Masovada, chooses or selects the family which most nearly harmonizes with its needs—or that the parents subconsciously choose a kindred spirit for their offspring. To this theory Kabo has added the suggestion that the individual by thousands of years of culture and development has acquired certain highly specialized brain centers which are passed on to the offspring ready for use when the new individual is properly trained, and that this has a bearing upon heredity. Kabo has all but proved his contentions by a series of surgical operations wherein he has successfully transferred the mentality of one animal to the body of another and——"

But Ruth was not listening. She had risen from her seat and her face was deadly pale.

"Why, what is the matter?" Himmun sprang to his feet startled.

"I see—I see!" cried Ruth almost incoherently. "That is what he has done to Joseph Kiser!"

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Himmun, bewildered.

"Don't you see, Himmun? He has—he has—my God! Why did we not suspect the truth before?"

"You can not mean that—that—why, Ruth, surely you do not believe——"

"I do not believe—I know! He has put the mentality of a beast within the body of Joseph Kiser!"

"But, Ruth, why do you think Kabo has done this thing? Such things are not done upon Masovada."

"But there can be no doubt! Kabo did this thing and kept Joe imprisoned until he escaped quite by accident. His path of destruction started within Kabo's gardens and he returned there with me before he carried me into the forest. He spoke the Martian language and claimed to be one of the marbs who had been taken into captivity some months before, and now I remember his having told the marbs that Kabo had captured him, although I did not notice it at the time."

At first Himmun was inclined to doubt Kabo's guilt but he was forced to concede that the evidence was overwhelming, and at length he got in communication with Kabo and demanded that the scientist's garden be opened to Councilar inspection.

Kabo tried to play for time, but Himmun would take no excuses; he demanded an immediate investigation of Kabo's estate and at length Kabo came to terms.

"Himmun," he urged, "I am ready to confess my guilt in this matter. I have suffered the agonies of the damned because of having done this thing, but once I had started it I feared to stop. Just stop this Councilar investigation and I will restore the Earthling as best I can. Of course there will be a certain element of danger connected with the operation of restoration because of the scar tissue which will be encountered, but I think I can restore them. God knows I have been punished sufficiently—I did this

thing before I knew that there were others in the Earthman's party, and you may imagine the suspense I have borne since the search for him was started. I can not bear the thought of being disgraced and deported, and I will bargain with you for the restoration of the Earthling: if you withhold your knowledge of my guilt I will restore him, but if you report me to the Council he shall remain forever as he is."

19. Restoration

NOT one word did Kabo broadcast regarding Delam Oblene, but he must have known that his whole secret would be found out when Kiser was restored, and of course the indolent Nebond would reveal his duplicity in regard to Pilluth's injury; so he dared not execute his original plan regarding his former assistant; and so it was that about the time when the Earthman's "recovery" was announced, Pilluth was able to sit in a wheel-chair for a few minutes at a time.

The Earthman's recovery was another great triumph for Kabo, who announced at the same time that his niece, Delam Oblene, whom he had thought dead for some months, had in reality been afflicted with the same malady which had crazed Joseph Kiser and that with an operation of his own designing he had restored the reason of both. It was quite a new malady, Kabo announced, but now he felt that he had it under perfect control so that there would be no further spread —just as many times before he had controlled other maladies which had harassed the Masovadans.

Although much further incensed at Kabo for his treatment of Delam Oblene, Himnun was overjoyed at her restoration "from the dead," as it were; and since the Councilor Scientist had made himself a popular idol of the Martians by his supposed accomplishments, he reasoned that it would not be best to denounce him for his crimes and chose to remain silent. But not so Pilluth.

How long Pilluth had been gone from the Emergency House before his absence was discovered none of the attendants knew. He had not as yet been allowed to walk and certainly was not able to leave the institution alone.

The alarm was at once broadcast and an attempt was made to communicate with Kabo, but he could not be reached. Many times his vibratory rate was concentrated upon but he did not respond. What could be the matter? And why had Pilluth disappeared? The superintendent was notified and he rushed at once to the landing-terrace to go in search of the missing sick man, but when he reached the terrace he uttered an exclamation of surprize, for his kandike was gone!

The institution was in a fever of excitement; attendants were questioned, messages were broadcast over the city, the Councilor Chief was notified, and, attempted communication with Kabo having failed, an effort was made to reach Pilluth himself—all without result.

The excitement at the Emergency House had reached the degree of its maximum intensiveness when the superintendent's kandike was joltingly parked upon the landing-terrace and Pilluth staggered out of it, to fall fainting into the arms of the astonished attendants.

When Pilluth had been put to bed and revived he asked for Himnun.

"I have done what I considered my duty," said Pilluth as Himnun seated himself at the bedside. Then he related in detail what had happened since the landing of the Earth-craft, and added: "Knowing that you must have bargained with Kabo I was not content to lie still

and allow him to go free with the applause of all Masovada. His depravity demanded severe punishment, and I elected to administer it; so I sneaked away from the Emergency House and performed upon him his own operation, transferring his mentality to the body of Nebond and the mentality of Nebond to the body of Kabo just as he did in the case of Joseph Kiset."

Himnun gasped and sprang to his feet in his amazement. "What! You mean to tell me that you did that horrible thing?"

"Yes, and Kabo got no more than he justly deserved. Or—I should have said that I *attempted* to make the interchange; for there was so much scar tissue in Nebond's brain and he was so weakened from his previous recent operation that I do not believe he can recover. That is—Kabo will die. Kabo in Nebond's physical body will die; but with proper care Kabo's body and Nebond's mentality will survive."

"My God, Pilluth! Why did you do that? Is there no way in which your work may be undone before it is too late?"

"There are none who can perform that operation excepting Kabo and myself; I am dying and Kabo is probably likewise dying. Even should he recover there will be no one left to restore him unless he might train someone else and teach another his technic, even as he taught it to me.

"I realized that the escapade would probably be fatal to me, but I felt it my duty to punish Kabo as he deserved to be punished, since you were in all probability bound to secrecy by such promises as you must have made in order to obtain the release of Delam Oblene and the Earthling. I also felt it my duty to make sure that the visiting Earthlings should never return to their own planet. I have punished Kabo and I have destroyed the Earth-craft; now if death comes I shall be ready, I can face my next incarnation without remorse, without regrets."

"You destroyed the Earth-craft! Pilluth, you are mad! Why did you do that?"

"I felt that I must thus safeguard Masovada against the reign of terror that might ensue if the strife-loving Earthlings were to build hundreds of similar craft and invade the planet with their greed and avarice and their implements of war. Theirs is a competitive system, and to have them among us would destroy our own co-operative methods; for the two are incompatible and the one must be evolved. I considered the Earth-craft a menace to the peace and safety of Masovada. True, just now they can not replenish their air supply, but it would be only a short while until they should bethink themselves of taking the craft to Trandos, where the atmospheric pressure is almost as great as on the Earth. Kabo confessed to me while partially under the influence of the Strotan Ray that he had marooned both his victims on the satellite and had secretly purloined the Earth-craft and made two successful voyages to Trandos; once to convey them there and once to fetch them back for their restoration. There the air supply could be replenished and they could not long resist the longing to return to Earth and impart the truths of our superior advancement, which the Earthlings are not yet ready to receive—not by thousands of years. I doubt if the craft may be reproduced on Masovada, because here we have none of the helium gas with which they fill certain of their so-called 'vacuum tubes'; not at any rate for many, many years."

Pilluth's voice became very weak. His lips were becoming quite blue, due to cir-

culatory failure, and even Himnun, inexperienced as he was in the branch of science pertaining to disease, knew that the man was dying. He called a nurse to the bedside and hurried out to render what assistance might be given to the hapless Kabo and to break the news of the destruction of the *Arrogant* to the Earthlings.

This news, however, they received with far more fortitude than Himnun had expected. All had learned to love the marvelous advantages of the Martian life and their desire to return to the strife and contention of Earth had ebbed quite low, save for the desire to tell the inhabitants of the Earth about the unique wonders of the Martian civilization in order that they might hasten their own evolutionary progress; and now that their last chance to do this was gone they could live happily on Mars with no qualms of conscience regarding Earthly progress.

When Himnun saw the glances that were exchanged between Ruth and Joseph Kiser he was glad that he had not pushed his suit for the hand of the Earth-girl more vigorously, but more than this was his heart gladdened by the smile bestowed upon him by Delam Oblene, who was now restored to her rightful body and her wondrous beauty. And so it was left for Professor Hervy and Merlene to restore the needed physical prowess to the Martians if it were to be restored in this generation.

20. *In Conclusion*

THE foregoing is an accurate and fairly detailed account of the adventures of my old friend and schoolmate, Joseph Kiser, as it came to me at various times over my huge "Radograph," a new modification of the Morse instrument of my own invention, the only existing duplicate of which Kiser took with him upon his memorable expedition some three years ago.

At times I have doubted its authenticity, for it all seems so stupendous and unreal, and the chances for fraudulent communication must be conceded; but when I stop to consider the character of Joseph Kiser, a man whose veracity has always been quite beyond any shadow of reproach, a man whose word has always been as good as a government bond, and who has never had any patience with fraud or fraudulent dealings of all kinds, I know that he would not intentionally deceive me. I know, too, that it is he sending, he has proved himself many times by relating, with our specially arranged code, incidents known only to him and myself.

How well do I recall our last meeting on the eve of their momentous departure from Earth, an event which thrilled the whole world with the base absurdity of the thing!

I, too, had denounced him as a fool for engaging upon such a venture, and berated him soundly for allowing his sweetheart to join in so hazardous a journey; but at the last moment I clasped his hand and tearfully bade him farewell, for to me then it seemed a certainty that he was going forth to his death.

"Keep faith with me, Lon," he said in parting; "be sure and do not allow yourself to grow rusty on our code, and keep on trying for at least five years. Wherever we land, if we do land, I'll manage somehow to provide for power enough to reach you. Just keep listening, Lon; promise me you'll keep on listening."

And I promised, although it grieves me now to recall how near I came to breaking that promise, for I had not the least hope then of ever having the opportunity of answering his signals. In fact, I never approached my instrument with

the thought of Kiser in mind that I did not feel quite silly because of the subconscious hope that he might be calling me.

It was more than two years after the departure of the *Arrogant* when I caught the first signal from Joseph Kiser. At first it did not register upon my consciousness, and was only an unintelligible series of ticks; some amateur perhaps, for my Radograph will receive from any Morse instrument. I listened intently, trying to interpret the message. Then suddenly I was alert; it was Kiser's call in our code.

I seized the key and sent him my answer. He spent several whole minutes sending nothing but emphatic ejaculations of joy. He had established communication with the Earth, and his joy seemed unbounded. Then he spent several hours unfolding to me the foregoing story. The reception was very poor at times and he had even greater difficulty in receiving from me; consequently there are many things which he tried to tell me which I have been forced to omit from this narrative because I could not get it clearly enough to comprehend, and strange to say, since that day I have never been able to communicate with him at all. Although I have tried diligently night and day for many weeks and months, the line of communication between Earth and the planet Mars appears to have been permanently broken.

What has happened in this connection I do not have the faintest idea. Perhaps my friend has been killed; perhaps the Martian authorities did not want to have the Earthmen know of the success of the *Arrogant's* flight lest others attempt it and likewise succeed; perhaps the batteries with which Kiser operated the Radograph have worn out and they are unable to replace them upon Mars. Or yet perhaps I may hear more from him later, who knows?

I know that there are many things which Joseph Kiser would like to tell me and which he will yet tell me if the opportunity offers, and so I am hoping, listening, signaling, praying for more news from Mars, more of the culture and knowledge that we may the sooner evolve to a higher state of being than that of Earthworms of Karma.

[THE END]

A Tale of a Fire Elemental

THE FLAME FIEND

By N. J. O'NEAIL

THANKS, Archer, I'll be glad to join you, but with just one stipulation—and it must seem an insane one; that you don't light a fire in that huge fireplace of yours.

No, I'm not joking. Call it an absurd whim, if you choose; though God knows it's not that, either; I was never more serious in my life. I know it's a cool evening, with a wind blowing, that bites like sin itself; but I'd rather face a lifetime in the eternal ice at the pole, than — well, no matter about that.

It isn't that I've any Eskimo complex; I crave warmth, and shrink from cold, more than the average man. But—well, as I said, there's no use trying to explain it. I could, of course, but you wouldn't believe me; you'd be a fool if you did.

Set it down to pyrophobia, if you like. An obsession? Well, yes, perhaps. But you needn't look at me like that; there's nothing psychopathic about it. My mind's as sound as it ever was, and as normal; and that's a wonder, perhaps, after—oh, damn it, Archer, on second thought I'd better not go; I'd only have you studying me all evening as if I were an object lesson in idiosyncrasies. Just forget that I ever mentioned any such thing.

No, it's no use trying to explain; I never have, yet. I'd sooner be classed as just plain eccentric than as a combination of liar, lunatic and hophead. No, you might not, old man, but I couldn't ask even you to believe—well, damn it, why not, after all? Now that you've got my thoughts running through that channel of hell again, it might ease my mind—as I said, you won't believe me; but at least you won't laugh at me.

Besides, it should be of particular interest to you, since it has a bearing on poor old Sharples and his fate. You remember him, of course, with his deep-sunken, brooding eyes, gleaming above his big beak of a nose, and his graying, reddish hair, straggling awry from under that rum old skull-cap? Why, of course; we were in his class in applied psychology together. Can't you still see him there on the platform, dinning into our adolescent ears the supremacy of mind over matter?

He dabbled, of course, in all kinds of occult research; "dabbled" isn't the word, either, for it was the absorbing passion of his life. I don't suppose there have been a dozen men in the last century who had delved so deeply into black letter lore. It was rumors about some of his experiments, you remember, that finally led to his being cropped from the faculty.

He confided to me, once, that one of his favorite theories was that of materialization. I don't mean any spiritualist seance hokum, with ectoplasm and table-tapping and spirit messages; but the power of the human mind, by thought-concentration, to summon up in tangible, physical form objects from other worlds, wherever and whatever those other worlds may be.

None of us, of course, took much stock in his hobbies at that time; I wish to God I had, for that might have saved me—but I'm rather running ahead of myself.

After the old chap left the university, you remember, he buried himself in an old hunting-lodge up in the Rockies, and there kept on with his researches. He wrote me, once, about two years ago; a letter as curt and enigmatic as most of his lectures, but hinting that he was on the verge of triumph in some weird experiment, and inviting me to visit him whenever I could find the time.

It was just a couple of weeks later that we read of the poor old beggar's uncanny death; you, of course, were abroad at the time, and may not have heard many of the details. A couple of hunters found his body stretched on the floor of his cabin, his head and throat incredibly mangled. It might have been the work of a puma or some other giant cat, so far as appearances went; but it couldn't have been, for the door and every window of the lodge were locked.

In fact, there was no end of mystery and to-do about it, for weeks. The thing was so inexplicable that the hunters who had found him were under suspicion, for a time; but their records were clean, and there was no possible motive for murder, so they were released, and the case lapsed into the long list of unsolved enigmas.

Three months or so later, a business trip took me to the coast, and set me thinking once more of Sharples. I had always had a deep admiration for the old chap, and I believe that in his gruff way he was fond of me, too. It hurt me to think that I hadn't had a chance of accepting his invitation to visit him; and then the fancy seized me to pay a sort of posthumous call; at any rate, to visit the spot where he had met his end.

It lay on a God-forsaken slope in the Rockies, twenty miles from the nearest settlement; and I spent the better part of a day scrambling up the rocky incline and cutting my way through festering undergrowth that twined, snake-like, round my legs.

IT WAS just growing dusk when I finally reached the lodge, a solitary log structure, bathed in a blood-red glow from the setting sun, as I approached it. A single, dying pine tree stood like a mournful sentinel beside the building; for the rest, the landscape was a boulder-strewn waste, with an occasional clump of bushes in the distance.

The place would have been gloomy enough, even at midday; and I give you my word that in the gathering shadows I felt a distinct physical chill as I opened the door of the lodge.

The building consisted of three rooms; a large rectangular living-room, with a tiny bedroom and a kitchen opening off it, on the left. A huge stone fireplace, fully twelve feet wide, and towering to the ceiling, was built into the right-hand wall.

The furniture, of the simplest, had been left apparently just as it was during Sharples' lifetime. There was a large, plain wooden table, piled high with dog-eared volumes, almost any one of which would have been evidence enough to send the old man to the stake, a few centuries ago; an armchair, a few other chairs, and a battered trunk; and every item in the collection semed to be enveloped in an almost tangible aura of sinister isolation.

The other rooms were furnished in just as Spartan style. A tousled cot, a single chair and a shelf piled high with more books were all that were to be seen in the bedroom; in the kitchen, a few granite dishes, cooking-utensils and a small shelf, piled with canned foods.

By now, night had fallen in earnest, and I found the cabin growing momentarily chillier, both physically and mentally. And it didn't make matters any the more cheerful when, playing my electric torch over

the floor, I perceived several dark blotches in front of the fireplace; reminders of the unexplained tragedy those walls had witnessed.

I had brought food with me, prepared for an overnight stay in the cabin, but at that moment the prospect was far from appealing to me. However, I wasn't anxious to tackle that twenty-mile trek back to the village, by dark; and then, a sudden savage patter of rain on the roof helped me make up my mind. The cabin would be my shelter, until dawn, at least.

I found a pile of pine knots beside the cabin, and with an armful of these soon had a fire blazing, which helped to dispel the gloom. As I munched my solitary meal, the rain kept up its tattoo on the roof, and several vicious lightning flashes tore a passage through the air, just outside the window; but I preferred even the storm's accompaniment to the tomb-like stillness that had preceded it.

After supper, with the aid of a kerosene lamp that I discovered in the kitchen, I started on a more thorough inspection of the place, and my heart was touched at the evidences of the hermit-like life poor old Sharples must have led; to say nothing of the unexplained gruesomeness of his death.

I could hardly hope to find anything that would shed any light on that, of course, since the cabin had been thoroughly searched at the time; so I turned to an examination of the old man's books.

I doubt if anywhere else on this continent you could have found such a library of occult lore, of sorcery and necromancy from the days of earliest Egypt down to Twentieth Century psychic research. As the tempest's fury swelled, outside, I turned the pages of one cabalistic volume after another. They weren't the sort of thing to be fathomed at a glance; but the little that I gathered from them opened up vistas of things unseen and unthinkable, that appalled me.

I tell you, Archer, there are not only more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in your philosophy, but there are far more in hell, too; for in those printed pages I saw things hinted at, that could only emanate from the deepest hell of hells. And as for what followed——

Finally, between the pages of one incredible tome, a translation from the ancient Egyptian, I fell upon something of a far deeper personal interest—a pad of scribbling-paper, covered with a familiar scrawl—the handwriting of old Sharples himself, as cryptic a hieroglyph as any ever inscribed on the oldest pyramids.

It appeared to be a diary, in which he had recorded his progress with experiments of some sort, but so laconically that I could gather little from them. The last entry was dated—as nearly as I could recall—four or five days before the finding of his body.

"Threshold of triumph at last," it read. "Tonight — final proof . . . danger if control falters . . . formula of Sothmi should suffice."

Then I glanced at the book in which I had found the notes. From the page at which it was open, I read:

> Notable among such elementals is the salamander, the spirit of fire. This being, Sothmi describes as having the aspect of a giant lizard, with protruding fangs and claws . . .

At that moment the light of the kerosene lamp flickered and vanished, leaving the room illuminated only by the dancing rays of the fire. I saw that the lamp was empty; so I heaped another armful of pine knots on the blaze, and drew the armchair up closer to it.

I HAD brought the book with me, but as a particularly vivid flash of lightning stabbed the darkness outside, and a clap

of thunder snarled in its wake, I hesitated to read on. My mind and feet seemed to be treading a dangerous labyrinth, whose tortuous windings might lead at least to madness, if not to some abyss of hell.

As the fire crackled, and the flames leaped hungrily ever higher toward the ceiling, I gazed into their glowing depths. Strange, I thought, that my mind should so focus on the fire when a moment before I had been reading of the mythical spirit of fire. But after all, was it so strange?

That uncanny snatch of description was running through my mind—"the aspect of a giant lizard, with protruding fangs and claws"—and I tried, blind fool that I was, to conjure up a mental image of such a being.

Of course, I told myself, it was preposterous to sit in the Twentieth Century of Christian civilization and dream of a creature of five-thousand-year-old fable. And yet, those words obtruded still on every cell of my brain—"the aspect of a giant lizard, with protruding fangs and claws."

By now, I was staring into the fire with the fixed fascination of a crystal-gazer. There's a hypnotic force about a blazing flame, Archer; small wonder, I reflected, that primitive races had either deified it, or at least imbued it with a personal spirit —the salamander.

As I gazed into the fire, an illusion gradually grew upon me that my brain was whirling round and round in a circle, at the center of which crouched the figure the book had described—"a giant lizard, with protruding fangs and claws." . . .

I grant you, Archer, that that was pure illusion; auto-hypnosis, if you will. But what followed wasn't.

For suddenly, above the roar of the storm outside, and the crackling of the fire —which had now grown so hot that I had moved my chair back from it — I heard a sound which turned me cold with dread, as no sound has ever done before or since.

It was a peculiar, sibilant hiss, which came to my ears as clearly as though all else had been dead silence. It wasn't unlike the hiss of an angry cobra, if you've ever heard that none-too-pleasant sound; but it possessed, too, some incredible, unearthly quality which set my head reeling with involuntary nausea.

And above all, it appeared to come from the very center of the fire.

For a moment I looked backward toward the door, and pondered the possibility of breaking away and spending the night even in the open, in that downpour of rain, if necessary. But then I got a tighter grip on my nerves; and, trying to convince myself against my own knowledge, that it was all imagination, I turned to face the fire once more.

As I did so, that diabolical hiss came once more, followed by a peculiar, stertorous grunting; and then, in the very heart of the flame, I beheld something gradually assuming visible form.

First it appeared to be a mist, or vapor; and then, out of the mist, two dreadful green spots glowed, like searchlights playing from the very bowels of hell. And then the mist seemed to settle into a solid outline—such an outline that I screamed aloud in horror of soul, and sprang from my chair, and would have burst out into the night, but in a twinkling the ungodly thing had leaped straight from the heart of the flame and gripped me by the throat.

Archer, this is the living truth, I swear it, as I am a living man this moment. I haven't words — human tongue hasn't power—to describe adequately that foul spawn of Satan that had materialized from thin air before my very eyes.

The description I had just read—"a giant lizard, with protruding fangs and claws"—fitted it, as far as it went, but it

didn't begin to picture the soul-sickening repulsiveness of the object.

It wasn't unlike a Gila monster in general appearance, if you can conceive of a Gila monster five feet in length, with a slimy black body and ghastly horned head, eyes that glowed alternately red and green, fang-like teeth projecting from a satanically slavering mouth, and forelegs with claws like those of an eagle.

And this unutterable horror was the Thing that had torn the life from poor old Sharples' body. I realized that, in the same twinkling of an eye that it had catapulted itself upon me.

I was so unnerved in soul and body that a breath of wind could almost have floored me, and I collapsed like a rag beneath the spring of the monster. Then, as I found myself flat on the floor, with its ruthless talons sinking into my throat, and its foul face pressed close to mine, its breath searing me like a blast from hell, despair gave me new strength.

I don't know whether old Sharples was there in spirit, aiding me in my battle against that atrocity from the shades, or not, but I dug both hands into the creature's throat, and twined its legs about its flopping body, with the grip of a boa constrictor.

Even in that hectic accumulation of horror upon horror, I experienced a fresh twinge of nausea to find that although the Thing had emerged from the heart of the flame, its body was as icy cold as though fresh from a tomb.

Old Dante himself, Archer, could scarcely have painted in one-tenth of its ghastliness a word-picture of the struggle there in that lonely cabin, with thunder, lightning and rain outside lending a fitting accompaniment.

It seemed like hours—in reality it can't have been five minutes, for no human being could have lived so long in such unequal combat—that I tossed and grappled with that awful Thing. I felt, in my heart of hearts, that the struggle was vain; that I couldn't hope to kill, or even to overcome, this Thing which wasn't of earth. But still, with the frenzy of despair, I tore at its neck and kicked at its pulpy body, as those savage talons bit into my shoulders and that unspeakable mouth, with its protruding fangs, hovered close above mine.

And then the bestial jaws opened wider, and I knew the end was at hand, and I prayed to God as I've never prayed before, that it might come with merciful quickness.

And it did. There was a sudden, blinding flash, and then a crumbling, rattling, roaring sound as though the universe itself were falling in ruins; something crashed on my head, and then—oblivion.

You probably don't believe in miracles, Archer, but I do, ever since that night. I'm firmly convinced that it is due to divine intervention that I'm alive today.

When the mists lifted from my brain, I lay in a pile of stone wreckage on the floor of the cabin, racked with agony in every limb. My first conscious thought was of that fiend from the shades; then, as I raised my head slowly, to look for it, I realized that it had vanished, and that the blessed light of day was streaming in the windows.

No, no, Archer, it wasn't a dream. Here—just a minute until I loosen my collar; you'll notice that I wear it particularly high. Do you see those scars on my throat? No dream could have put them there. If those unholy claws had gone a quarter of an inch farther, they'd have torn my jugular vein open.

Well, explanations are always an anticlimax, so I'll cut mine as short as possible, combining what I observed there and what I learned later, from a closer study of Sharples' books.

The thing that had killed Sharples, and come within an ace of doing the same to me, Archer—you won't believe it, I know —was, literally, a salamander, one of those elemental beings which form a connecting link between this world and some world beyond.

An elemental, of course, is a disembodied thing, only capable of action if it can get control of a physical body as an instrument. And old Sharples had created such an instrument for this creature.

Those diabolical old volumes of his contained, among many secrets, the ritual to be followed in the summoning of an elemental in material form. The theory was that by sheer concentration of willpower, an adept, or sorcerer—call him what you will—could create a material body or shell for such a spirit.

In the case of the salamander, there were two essentials: first, the concentration of the mind, and secondly, a strong, hot fire—the native element of the creature. And old Sharples had succeeded, as he had dreamed of doing, in actually incarnating the monster which had cost him his life.

The materialization was a limited one, as all such materializations are, thank God; limited as to place and time. The salamander was fettered, you might say, to that spot; it could move only a few feet from the flames in which it had sprung into being, and it dematerialized once more, the moment the flames died.

But once summoned into actual existence, probably for the first time in a score of centuries, the Thing was still chained, unseen, at that spot; and hence, far less concentration of thought was necessary to summon it a second time. The fire, and the involuntary focusing of my mind on what I had read, were sufficient.

Then came the miracle that saved me, at the moment when it seemed that scarcely even a miracle could intervene.

In that instant when that hell-born creature's fangs were at the point of meeting in my throat, a lightning bolt had struck the stone chimney of the cabin, and had sent it crashing inward, shattering the fireplace and instantly extinguishing the flames—with the consequence that the salamander's material body had evaporated into the air from which it had emanated.

That's my story, Archer, and—well, just a point or two more, perhaps.

As I say, I realized later that that damnable Thing was still lurking invisible within the cabin, thirsting with all its unholy force for another opportunity of taking physical form.

There wasn't much likelihood of that, perhaps, since the fireplace was irretrievably shattered, and even if any wayfarer in that desolate region had chanced to build a fire there, there'd be practically no chance of his turning his thoughts in a dangerous direction.

But, I was resolved to take no chances on its ever being loosed on human eyes again; so I did probably a high-handed and unlawful thing. A week later I climbed that tortuous mountain slope again, and laid a charge of dynamite beneath the cabin, which leveled it in a tangle of wreckage, to the ground.

Sharples' books I removed first, poured kerosene over them, and set them alight —with a long fuse, incidentally, for I preferred to be a couple of miles from the spot when those sinister pages flared into flame.

There's nothing more to add, except that from that day to this I've never dared to face flame, for fear my mind, in sheer defiance of my sanity, may focus there once more, and summon up some other lurking messenger from hell.

GESTURE

by

Gertrude Macaulay Sutton

"A mask—a black mask! She dropped it on the bed."

HALLOWE'EN at the Hotel Alcazar. Jazz, rainbow balloons, masks, carnival!

And in a room on the fourth floor a girl, returned from a *rendezvous* with the dead.

She pressed cold fingers against her ears, till her head filled with a hollow roaring. She could not do that for long. Let them play! Dance music for the gay, the young!

Dropping her hands, she resumed her pacing of the room, only to halt yet again before a photograph on the dressing-table.

"Peter!"

She stood looking into the large eyes, at the mouth which six weeks ago . . .

That music! Every note was drawn from her taut nerves.

Hallowe'en! The eve of All Hallows' Day, of the day of the blessed dead. He had given his life for another. For a little child whom he did not know. Inasmuch as ye do it unto the least of one of these little children. . . . Yes, of a certainty he was among the "blessed dead."

She had come eagerly, as to a tryst. The hope of this journey had been anodyne. For it she had schemed and deceived, had written to a friend; not a friend attuned to her despair, a very gay friend, but a friend

now prized because living in New York. And the reply had been both gay and friendly.

"By all means, come. New York will do you good. Moping never helped anybody, alive or dead."

Her parents had consented, surprized, relieved.

But between the date which she had given her family and that which she had given her light-hearted friend there was a discrepancy. She had cheated from the pattern two days for herself in New York —days of *rendezvous*.

For she had not been able to accept death submissively. The family clergyman had come, wise and kind. She had thanked him. No tears. No unburdening.

She had found that she had no faith. She had found that faith would not do. She must *know*.

She had haunted public libraries, had bought many books. She read all she could find for and against a future life. Oh, yes, both sides. Ray Lankester, Clodd, other agnostics. The stiffer-brained psychic researchers. The vast literature of slop about survival she discarded as an insult. Cold academic things like Balfour's *Ear of Dionysius* brought comfort. It seemed that she *could* hope, and yet be rational.

Then she had taken her resolve. She would communicate with Peter. It had become an obsession. To hear from him that he lived, that he forgave.

In New York she would ask the Institute of Psychic Science for a medium known to them as honest. She would be rational, she would not fool herself. She would ask Peter to give her something evidential. Then, proof of Peter's identity having been given, she would beg him to forgive, would tell him how desperately she now loved him.

FIVE weeks today. She had just finished that difficult letter to Peter. If she posted it at once, he would have it before he left New York to come to her for the week-end. As she put on her hat and coat, she had been called to the telephone.

A telegram that Peter was dead. Killed in a street accident, saving a strange child from an oncoming motorbus.

Telling no one of the message, she had returned to her room, had locked the door, and had burned her letter to Peter.

Then she had sat down, and had stared at the opposite wall. Her brain had become a gramophone record. It rasped out words of the telephone message, scraps of the letter just destroyed.

. . . regret to inform you that Peter Edgington—dear Peter for some time I have been fighting—killed in a street accident—fighting the realization that you and I—saving a child . . .

It became incredible that an hour ago she had decided Peter too uninteresting to spend her life with; had decided that even as a lover he had a little too much *manner*, was a little theatrical!

She remembered only their swift romance, his impulsive ardor. And having tired of him living, she had fallen the more desperately in love with him dead.

Of the burned letter, the disloyalty, she told no one. Remorse edged her grief. *She*—false to her word, false to the beauty, radiant if nebulous, of their dramatic courtship—she had presumed to think him dull! His letters might not have been—well, brilliant—but he had been loyal, he had been fine, in death he had been heroic.

Her mind knew only the beauty of their love, the tragedy of his death, and a passionate remorse.

ARRIVED that morning in New York, she had gone at once to the Institute of Psychic Science.

Yes, they could recommend a medium, absolutely trustworthy, and with a record of excellent results.

Could she have a sitting today? If successful, another tomorrow? She was only in New York for a brief time.

The secretary, a brisk, intelligent woman, had offered to telephone Mrs. Parmenter. She did so.

Yes, that afternoon at five o'clock. What name?

And her name had sounded in her own ears like that of a stranger. For these two days were to be quite outside the pattern of her life, beyond the strange human labels people bore.

Besides, what did it matter? The secretary was used to such requests. No one else was in the room, excepting a man who had entered and who was engrossed in some pamphlets spread out on a table.

The secretary then wrote Mrs. Parmenter's address on a slip of paper.

"Would it be all right if I were to take notes? I might want to consult them later."

"By all means. Mrs. Parmenter prefers her clients to take notes."

As she put the slip of paper in her handbag and turned to go, she saw the secretary smile familiarly to the next "customer."

"So glad the sittings are being successful. I have that list of books ready for you, and I am arranging for a third medium for you to try."

It was all as crisp and business-like as the selling of groceries.

AND the seance had been—a ghastly failure!

Mrs. Parmenter, a plump woman in a negligée, had greeted her with kind impersonality, and had told her to sit quietly.

Mrs. Parmenter had closed her eyes, and after a few minutes had begun to breathe in an odd, heavy manner, then to mumble. At last words had come:

"Confusion—oh, so much confusion! Conditions are bad—very bad. Several people want to speak to you. An old gentleman—has a gray mustache—says he is your grandfather — very sorry for you."

It was all in the notes. All futile and pointless. A grandfather was a safe guess. Mrs. Parmenter was doubtless honest. But Mrs. Parmenter's subconscious no sane person could trust.

There had followed generalities applicable to any grandfather. True, they did apply to her own grandfather, but not necessarily exclusively to him.

"You are in trouble—oh, yes, in deep trouble!"

So were most clients of mediums.

Then that saccharine message: *"Your grandfather says that you are not to be so unhappy, that happiness is close to you."*

Kind, that. Of Mrs. Parmenter's subconscious.

Next had come a jumble of incoherencies, irrelevant things that were disturbingly reminiscent of ignominious fortune-telling. And yet—a strange, eery feeling was creeping over her, a feeling as if some third presence were in the room.

"A dark man"—Peter had had bright red hair!—*"I get something about dancing —dance music—and a mask!"*

She tried to be scientific. She knew that genuine messages had to filter through the subconscious mind of the medium, that they were often interlarded between haphazard tags of the conscious mind. Mrs. Parmenter was getting muddled up with Hallowe'en festivities.

Suddenly Mrs. Parmenter stiffened. *"I can't get through—confusion. But I get help for you. I see a black mask"*—(most masks were black)—*"and, yes, a dark man."* (Oh, those dark men of the palmists!)

And despite her skepticism, a shudder as if a chill from another world passed over her at the words—a black mask.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Parmenter, I know you are trying." The sitter must show a sympa-

thetic attitude. "Won't you, please, try a little longer?"

She realized that the seance was about to close—a failure. She threw overboard hopes of evidential proofs.

"Mrs. Parmenter, I want very much, *very much,* to communicate with a red-haired man who died recently."

And this she said, not for her own sake, but on the remote chance of it reaching Peter. No comfort for *her* in helping out Mrs. Parmenter. But if Mrs. Parmenter had power, if this were merely one of those inexplicable bad sittings which even great mediums at times had, it *might* reach Peter.

"Only this, Mrs. Parmenter, ask him to *forgive* me."

Oh, it had been too distressing. Poor Mrs. Parmenter's subconscious, or control, or whatever it was that was bungling so ludicrously, caught at that word "forgive."

"Yes—yes—he is here—he is HERE—oh, very distressed—forgive—forgive—he's saying that, dear—begs you to forgive him—to forgive him—why, that's what you said yourself—says forgive and forget him" . . .

She had risen. "Thank you, Mrs. Parmenter. That—will do."

.

She stood looking at his photograph. She was very tired. For weeks she had eaten hardly anything. For weeks she had slept badly. For weeks her awakenings had been recurring shocks; that nightmare return of consciousness, return of *memory.*

She turned again to the notes of the seance. They were already flabby from much handling. Was there something she had missed? Some chink through which a glimmer had shone for her?

As she turned the pages, a knock sounded on her door. She started. Then she opened. The music came more loudly to her:

"Oh, where have you been all my life?"

A bellboy handed her a small packet. It was addressed to her. But no one knew she was here!

The boy gone, she tore off the wrappings.

A black velvet mask! Nothing more.

Some mistake. But her name on the paper! She examined it as if it were a cipher. She could find nothing unusual, unless a small flaw in the edge that would rest on the left cheek were of importance. A small flaw, as if someone had snipped out a V.

She dropped it on the bed.

Again she heard Mrs. Parmenter's entranced voice—*a mask—a black mask!*

But she had read of nothing like this. True, the other world was reported often to signal through normal channels. But a bellboy, a scrap of velvet—it was too mundane for her to accept.

But from where then *did* it come?

Oh, was it all a monstrous delusion? Were the results of even the sanest investigators the mere amassing of data on some as yet not-understood vagaries of the subconscious mind?

She looked at the black mask. Was *this* her sign? And if so, what its significance?

Still dance music drifted up to her room:

"Oh, where have you been all my life?"

It must be that she was to join the revellers, there to receive some message, meet some envoy.

Opening her trunk, she feverishly pulled out an evening gown. As she flung off the negligée she had been wearing, part of her brain smiled derisively. People had warned her that dabbling in "Spiritualism" ended in lunacy.

At this moment she might be insane. That mask, black on the white bed, might be a figment of her disordered brain. She had read those notes too often. No bell-

boy, perhaps, had called at her door. Well, of course, if she were to reason that way, anything might be nothing. She might not even be in New York.

She picked up the mask.

Was she going to meet Peter, or a message from him? She rouged her lips. Was this the fantasy of hysteria, was there no future, was Peter *dead?* By all means then let her gaud herself to meet such a mockery.

FROM the elevator she alighted on the mezzanine floor. She would wait. It was less crowded here than on the ground floor. Her mask made her indifferent to stray glances.

And to her they were a drifting picture —these hackneyed carnival marionettes.

A black-and-white Pierrot was looking at her. He was alone. He approached. He was at her side. He bent to her.

"Thank you for coming." His voice was deferential.

She looked up into a black velvet mask. His gaze seemed on the missing V in her own mask.

"From whom do you come?" she said slowly.

"From no one. None the less, I have a message. But—not yet. It is a question of —forgiveness."

She could not answer.

"Messages *do* come through human channels. You know that?"

"Yes. I know that. I have tried."

"I can not speak clearly while you are so tired—so weak."

Her notes beat through her mind. Dance music—a black mask—a dark man. The skull-cap of Pierrot hid his hair, the mask his face.

"Will you take off your cap?"

"My cap?" surprizedly. Without dislodging his mask, he carefully removed the cap.

Dark hair.

"Thank you. Why must I not see your face?" she asked in the accentless tones she had used through their interview.

"You do not want the message from a concrete personality. Let me remain a mask. Unless," he hesitated, "knowing all I bring you, you still wish otherwise."

"I am tired. Say what you have to say, and let me return to my room."

His voice was kind. "I don't want you to do that. You go back to unhappiness. I am very sure he does not want you to do that."

"How long am I to sit here—waiting? I can not go on talking. It leads nowhere."

He drew up a chair. For a moment neither spoke. A moment? She could not say. A moment, or ten minutes. She had no way of telling.

"May I tell you what I think he wants you to do?"

"Tell me."

"He wants you for a little while to forget everything. He wants you to come with me and to have supper. He wants you to forget everything." His voice had a soft even quality, as if he were trying to hypnotize her. "He wants you to dance. To dance on Hallowe'en night, knowing that the dead are not unhappy."

She was past astonishment. She made no protest at his incongruous words. He seemed speaking to her from a distance. She looked wearily at him.

"You are a man and young. Scores of pretty girls are about you, some not too severe. I will remain here. Return when you feel you can give me what it is you have for me."

"Won't you let me give you this one evening? I am very sorry for you."

Pity from a stranger! But she was too weak for resentment.

Suddenly he asked in practical tones, almost the tones of a physician. "Exactly how much have you eaten today?"

Eaten! She looked up. And then she

knew it was all unreal. Those rose-velvet chair-things, those rugs from somewhere men called "China," those carnival shadows—they were but veils drifting across her perception.

Again his quiet, level tones. "Exactly how much have you eaten today?"

"Doctors" they called people who talked that way.

"So you are a doctor?"

"Never mind that. Tell me."

Since such a trifle mattered to him, she told him. He rose abruptly.

"Come."

"I'm not hungry, not interested in food."

She seemed quite *outside* her body, but she heard a dull voice and knew it to be the voice she used.

And he was no longer envoy of the beyond. He was a very physical identity, by his will leading her into the elevator . . . down . . . to a garish supper room.

It took less effort to do what he bid her. Those soothing, even repetitions of his. Some chicken thing. Some tingling drink which he helped to prepare. It burned through her. It lit up her physical brain, a bescrawled palimpsest—indelible phrases —*there shall no heat strike them, neither shall the sun . . . Behold, I make all things new . . . eat, drink, and be merry. . . .*

She was again in her body; leaning over an emptied plate, and emptied glass, gazing into dark eyes behind a black mask. And on the table lay the mask which she had been wearing.

Her hand went to her face in quick dismay.

He was talking to her. She reached out to his voice. The words didn't matter.

"Now I can tell you my message. I know your name. I know that you were pledged to marry Peter Edgington."

Her hands clutched the edges of the table.

"I have something that Peter Edgington wants me to tell you. He asks you to forgive him." His voice became concise, as if he knew the scalpel must be used. Clearly he was a doctor. "What I have to tell will hurt. Peter died a hero, but in life he was very human. He was to have gone to you the week-end after his death to ask your forgiveness and release. He had fallen in love with another woman."

At last she spoke.

"The dead are not here to defend themselves. I must have some proof."

He removed his mask. Honest eyes, an honest face.

"It was," he reddened, "my own sister whom Peter Edgington wanted to marry when he died."

A weight was slipping from her. Life, long entranced, stirred again.

"You will not judge my sister. She thought Peter was free, until—there seemed to them no going back."

"*I* judge!" She told him of the unposted letter, the remorse, the return of love.

"He told my sister your name, but not where you lived. After his death my sister confided in me. My sister, distracted, determined to communicate with Peter Edgington's spirit. I begged that at least she avoid the harpies that cheat people who long to be cheated. I went for her to the Institute of Psychical Science. She found comfort. She had a series of sittings. Then she wished to try other mediums, something about obtaining 'cross-references.' She began to study psychical research. It seemed to be calming her, so I have gone often to the Institute to make necessary arrangements for her. This morning I was there, turning over some pamphlets, when I heard your name, the hour and address of your appointment with Mrs. Parmenter. I saw you. I knew

the truth would hurt, but also that it was due to you."

"Poor Peter!"

"I kept your appointment this afternoon. I followed you back to this hotel, so as to know where to reach you. You went to your room. I noticed the preparations for tonight's masquerade. Then—I thought of sending you the mask."

"But you could not know I would wear it. Coincidence alone brought that about. The medium's subconscious was muddled up with Hallowe'en, and so she spoke of a mask, a black mask——"

A strange look crossed his face.

"Of course, I don't believe in this at all—all this occult stuff. As a medical man I know and use hypnotism. The rest I mistrust. But—it's most extraordinary. *I* would never have thought of sending you that mask. It isn't sensible. It's theatrical. I'd have written, asking the privilege of a brief interview. But as I stood in the lobby this afternoon, the idea dropped into my brain from *outside*. I seemed to hear *'a black mask.'* It became an urge. I had the incredible feeling that Peter Edgington wished me to tell you that way."

He looked ashamed at talking so frayedly, and hastened to add sanely, "Of course I knew that tomorrow I could still ask for my interview, if you did not come tonight."

She gazed at him with clear, steady eyes.

"Will you dance?" he asked shyly.

She rose. And as she smiled, she knew why it was that Peter would have none of the "privilege of a brief interview" idea. Also, dear Peter had always loved a gesture!

The Invisible Bond

(Continued from page 301)

came. Presently we caught the faint glint of firelight through the trees.

"Hurry!" cried Leslie in a voice I scarcely recognized. "We are on the way to Elna. Hurry!"

Rightly or wrongly, he was convinced that the drums were leading him to his lost bride. He seemed to throw all caution to the winds as he crashed his way through the tangled scrub, heedless of everything except the red glimmer ahead. Had I not forcibly restrained him, I verily believe he would have dashed forward and attacked single-handed the horde of savages that were seated round the fire. I had to drag him under cover by main force.

"Are you mad?" I whispered, when I had got him behind the shelter of a clump of bushes. "They are fifty to one. You will not help Elna by throwing away your life."

The spot where we were crouching was about twenty yards from the fire which burnt brightly in the center of the small clearing. By the light of the leaping flames we were able to pick out the huge form of the witch-doctor as he sat a little apart from the rest, on a throne-like seat of carved wood. By his side, upon the ground, there crouched a slighter figure muffled from head to foot in a cloak of leopard skins. About ten feet away was Leon, the missing steward, lying bound hand and foot.

Some sort of ritual was in progress. Ever and again N'Zahgi would lift up his voice and intone a string of words,

and the rest would chant a response in thunderous unison, keeping time to the booming of the drums. Although neither Leslie nor I understood the language, we guessed from the growing excitement that the climax of the ceremony was near at hand.

Nor were we mistaken. The weird litany culminated in a sudden mighty shout; then there followed a tense, expectant silence, and every eye was turned toward the muffled figure which crouched beside the throne. For a space, during which one might count a hundred slowly, the seated savages remained as still and motionless as effigies of gleaming bronze. Then the drums began to beat a faster rhythm, and the crouching figure leapt to its feet and cast aside the leopardskin cloak, standing poised like some beautiful ivory statue in the firelight's glare.

A convulsive gasp came from the boy at my side.

"Elna!" His voice was so loud that but for the drums it would have led to our discovery. "My God!—it's Elna!"

But it was Elna in a new and dreadful guise. When I had seen her last she had been dressed like an ordinary English girl; now every vestige of civilization had been cast aside. Had it not been for the dazzling whiteness of her skin and the glory of her hair, bright as sun-kissed corn, she might have passed for one of the women of the tribe.

My first emotion was a sense of dull incredulity. Could this shameless jungle amazon be Elna—the girl whom I had watched over and reared, whom I had taught to ride straight, shoot straight, and live straight? Impossible!—the thing was absurd! That painted and feather-decked savage was not my little girl—rather was it some foul, flaunting demon who had gained possession of her white and flawless body—some poisonous spirit that had entered into her blood. . . .

Her blood? The truth rushed upon me like an overwhelming torrent as the thought crossed my mind. It was not her blood that now flowed in her veins—it was the blood of the naked savage who towered behind her with the light of triumph gleaming in his eyes. N'Zahgi had given his blood that she might live, and now he was about to lay claim to his own!

Suddenly Leslie caught my shoulder and twisted me around so that I faced him. Heavens! the boy was smiling. Had he gone mad?

"Don't you understand?" he whispered in a tone of immeasurable relief. "Elna is acting a part. She is dancing to fix their attention—to gain time. She knows that help is at hand, and she's just fooling the niggers so that they will not harm her until we can strike." And he pushed forward the safety-catch of his rifle and looked along the sights.

I made no reply, mercifully allowing the poor lad to extract what comfort he might from his idea. In my own mind I was sure that Elna was not acting. She was dancing and leaping like one possessed; in her hand she brandished a long, straight-bladed knife. Her features were working convulsively, her eyes blazing with mad excitement. And as she danced she drew nearer and ever nearer to the helpless steward on the ground.

A horrible fascination gripped me as I watched the ghastly drama, so that I seemed to lose all sense of my surroundings. All the while, floating through the mist of horror and dreadful expectancy that clouded my brain, came the memory of Kemp's words when he had hinted at the unhallowed rites practised by the "Red Drinkers."

At last the end came.

With a laugh that was like the shrill screech of a wild beast, the frenzied girl leapt at the helpless prisoner and plunged her knife into his throat. The horrified

cry that rose to my lips was stifled by another, and even greater horror; for the creature who bore the outward semblance to Elna Fanshaw had thrown herself full length on her writhing victim and was greedily sucking the living blood as it gushed from the wound.

I can only conjecture what must have been Leslie's state of mind at that moment. For myself, I seemed to be the victim of some ghastly nightmare from which I must presently awake. I simply could not believe the evidence of my own eyes as I saw the girl raise herself from her ghoulish feast, her victim's life-blood staining her delicate lips and running in tiny rivulets down her ivory breasts, and, standing erect with wide-flung arms, give voice to the exultant blood-call of the *Ghu-Fanti*.

At the sight, something must have snapped in the brain of the boy at my side. He threw his rifle to his shoulder, and the next moment the crash of its discharge awoke the echoes of the forest.

I like to think that he intended the bullet for N'Zahgi, but if so, he must have aimed badly. It was Elna who stiffened suddenly as she stood poised like a crimsoned vampire—stiffened, swayed, then pitched forward and lay still.

A second later I pressed my trigger and sent the witch-doctor down with a bullet through his skull. Then Leslie dashed into the throng of startled savages, swinging his clubbed rifle, dealing out death to every living thing within his reach, without a thought for his own life. I verily believe that at that moment Leslie wished to die. If so, he had his wish. The savages broke and ran for cover, but an arrow whizzed out of the darkness and buried itself in his heart. . . .

As the dawn was stealing into the eastern sky I laid the young husband and wife in a grave which I dug near the spot where they had died. If fate had sundered their lives so strangely, in death, at least, they were not divided.

I returned to the village to find it in the hands of the natives. The rest of our party had been surprized in their sleep and killed. Then I wandered into the bush, on and on, until I saw your smoke on the horizon. . . .

* * * * * * *

THAT was the story told me in weak, gasping sentences as my ship shouldered her way over the long rollers of the tropic sea. Of its truth or falsity the reader must judge for himself.

It may be possible that the infusion of savage blood formed a bond, invisible but unbreakable, between the gently nurtured white girl and the fierce devil-worshipper; it may be that the whole episode is but a figment of a fever-ridden brain.

At least it is certain that more will never be known, for the sole survivor of the ill-fated *Primrose* died at sundown that day, and the next morning we committed his body to the deep.

A Weird Story of Upper Michigan

The Tree of Life

By PAUL ERNST

IT WAS cold. God, it was cold! Outside the cabin a blanket of February snow showed leaden white under the heavy, midafternoon clouds. A keening wind growled through the bare-limbed trees. It rattled the dry boughs like the fingers of skeletons; and stole between the slats of the crude window to twitch at the shroud of the thing beneath.

It was from that sheeted, stark figure on the long bench that the greatest cold seemed to emanate. Nothing can be colder that a corpse. Nothing! A corpse seems to radiate a deathly chill that numbs the heart of whoever is near it.

Because of the shrouded body more than because of the actual temperature, I was chilled to the bone in spite of my inches of heavy clothing. I got to my feet and walked up and down the one room of the cabin, averting my eyes from the figure on the bench.

Then, in an effort to conquer fear with familiarity, I crossed the room and lifted the shroud from the hatchet face beneath.

An old woman, looking far older than her years because of her lifetime of toil and disappointments! The hair was scant and yellow-gray. The eyes, open and staring, were like gray stones. The nose seemed to have projected even farther in death than in life. It jutted out like the point of a wedge. There was nothing lovely in *this* pilgrim, set out for the farther shore. There was nothing reposeful here.

It was Mrs. Whilom, wife of Ab Whilom, our nearest farm neighbor. The old couple had been swindled out of their modest Ohio farm five years before. In their old age they had been forced to come to upper Michigan, bare-handed, to wrest a living from the unfamiliar soil. And now—this!

That noon my father and I had hitched up for the twelve-mile drive over laborious roads to town. (This was before the day of teeming autos and cement highways.) In front of the Whilom cabin my father had pulled up the horses and stopped.

Standing before us was Ab—a spare, gnarled man in whom age had curdled like milk in a thunderstorm.

"Jest a minute," he called, coming to the side of the wagon. "I need help."

"Anything we can do——" my father began amiably. He stopped at the look in Ab's eyes.

"My old woman's jest died," he said. The words were as perfunctory as though he had just announced that his hogs had cholera. But his eyes spoke for him. They were dazed, hollowed out with sense of loss.

"Somebody'd ought to stay with her while I go to town for the undertaker," continued Ab. "She couldn't never bide being alone. I'd hate to leave her alone now."

My father turned to me, doubtfully, speculatively.

"Think you can keep her company, son?"

My look must have showed how re-

pulsive I found the idea of a lonely vigil in the squalid cabin with a dead woman, for he hastened on.

"Never mind. I'll do it. You're pretty young. . . ."

Now the youth of youth is a sore point. His reminding me of my sixteen years was sufficient to make me insist on staying there while he drove Ab on into town.

So here I was, shivering in the mean little hut beside the dead Mrs. Whilom, blue with a cold that did not come entirely from the winter wind but that emanated straight from the shrouded thing on the bench under the window.

I REPLACED the sheet over the hawk features, and sat down before the fireplace. That psychic cold that struck through jacket and mackinaw, knee-high boots and heavy socks! I huddled closer to the fire, resolutely turning my eyes to the leaping flames. I did not want to look toward the dead woman.

I wondered if the body, in life, housed a deathless spirit, as most people claim it does. I wondered where this woman's spirit was. I fancied I knew what other spirit it was with at the moment.

Just before the land deal that had cheated the Whiloms out of their little farm, Ab's daughter had died. The daughter was an unfortunate creature, born blind and dull-witted and ugly. Her whole life had been filled by Mrs. Whilom. And the old lady, to hear Ab tell it, had concentrated all her frustrated hopes and ambitions in a ferocious maternal flame of love for her unfortunate child.

The two had talked without words, Ab had once said. The girl's soul, he said, was twisted around the mother's like a creeper around a tree.

Now was the daughter rejoined in death by the only person that had ever meant anything to her—the only light that had shone in her warped, blind world—her mother? Was the daughter's spirit hovering somewhere near, come to escort the spirit of her beloved parent?

I thought of these things as I huddled miserably over a fire that could not warm me, and prayed the time would not be too long in passing till my father and Ab got back with the undertaker.

I TURNED to the wood-box, which was full to overflowing, and dumped a big armful of split branches into the fire. This awful cold!

The fire roared higher as I fed it more wood. In an effort to counteract that chilling cold I built a blaze that threatened the safety of the cabin.

The first keen edge of my formless terror gradually wore off, as all keen edges do in time. The psychic chill was less numbing. Or, possibly, it was more numbing. I don't know. Perhaps my fear was now so great that my nerves refused to twitch to its stimulus any more. At any rate, calm, of a sort, came over me. And with this unnatural, stunned calm there came a relief from the coldness.

In spite of the open window, covered only by the few meager slats, in spite of the low temperature outside, I began to feel suffocated. I was dressed to be comfortable at zero. It must have been nearly 60° now in the low, small room.

I took off my mackinaw and loosened my collar. Then, as my feet felt the heat, my boots began to bother me. They were new—and stiff as only new knee-high boots can be. I took them off, too, and padded about in my heavy socks. I opened the door for a foot or so and propped it with a piece of firewood.

Trying to make my mind a blank, I sat down, a good way from the scorching fire. Another two hours would be

needed before the trip to town and back could be concluded. Two hours. Two centuries!

I sat there, keeping my eyes on the partly opened door so that I would not see the way the drafts twitched like ghostly fingers at the edge of the shroud.

There was a faint scratching on the bare-swept step outside. A small, tapered head, in which were set two beady eyes, was poked inquisitively around the edge of the door. A wood-rat. And an astonishingly bold one! Driven past fear, no doubt, by the attraction of the warmth and the smell of food in the cupboard.

Cautiously, with many a spasmodic retreat, it came into the cabin. It kept its hard little eyes warily on me. I stayed motionless, glad of any distraction.

After perhaps five minutes of maneuvering, it reached the center of the room and crouched, staring impudently up at me. I reached slowly down beside me for one of my boots. Slowly——

The wood-rat jerked toward the door, but stopped as my descending hand was stayed. It came back. And now my fingers were around the boot-top.

My hand snapped back and up. The rat raced for the door, but a foot away from it the flung boot chanced to catch it squarely. It kicked a little, and lay still, with a fleck of red dabbling its spiky, repulsive whiskers.

I started up to throw the dead rat out of the cabin, when another scratching sound on the step outside came to my ears.

It was a second wood-rat. And this one was either entirely fearless or lost to caution in its discovery of its fellow's fate.

Without even a glance at me, it streaked from the door to the furry body lying beside my boot. It sniffed around the dead rat with inquisitive nose, and stared at it with beady eyes. Then, almost before I could follow its movements, it had streaked for the door again, and was gone.

Almost at once it was back again. And in its mouth was a green leaf, about the size and shape of an oak leaf.

A green leaf! *Green!* In the middle of February in a region where winter is unrelenting and iron-bound!

My face must have been a mask of stupidity as I stared at that leaf. Where in the name of all that was miraculous could the rodent have found it? There were no green trees in the countryside at that time of year! I knew there were none. Yet —here was this leaf!

THE rat was less quick this time, less bold. It crept slowly toward the stiffening body of its mate. As it advanced it kept its glittering little eyes directed — not toward me, curiously enough, but toward the corpse.

There followed a most astounding spectacle.

The rat began to scurry aimlessly around the room as though something were chasing it. Carefully holding the amazing leaf clear of the floor, it dodged wildly from one wall to the other, always keeping its eyes fixed on thin air in front of it. I was as completely disregarded as though I had not been there.

Toward the improvised bier the rat scurried, only to double spasmodically away from it and run under my very chair. Had the thing gone mad? I began to fumble for my other boot, fear of a bite overcoming my curiosity to see the outcome of this inexplicable play.

The rat approached its dead mate again, keeping its eyes on a spot on the wall over the body — as if there were something there that was invisible to my eyes.

With a quick move it placed the green

leaf squarely on the little stark body. And behold—a miracle!

The rat that was dead was no longer dead! Under my very gaze it quivered and came to life. The legs jerked once or twice. The body twitched. The creature rose, limping and stiff, and followed its mate out the door!

My mind whirled in a blind chaos. That impossible green leaf—its contact with the dead rat—the resurrection of the little pest!

As had everyone else who lived in that part of the state, I had heard tales of a fabulous Tree of Life. Somewhere in the region there was said to be a tree that could raise the dead at a mere touch. The myth had been handed down to the old-timers by the Indians. My father had heard the yarn from his father, and had told it to me when I was a youngster and begged for a fairy-story.

It was a myth. Of course it was a myth! There could be no truth in such a thing! But—that wood-rat had surely been dead. And now it was alive!

I stared at the leaf, still lying on the floor. Like an oak leaf, it was, but of a softer texture and a lighter green. A leaf from the Tree——

My gaze went, fascinated, from the leaf to the body under the window.

A dead rat had come to life. Why could not a dead human being? Both were flesh. Both were made of the same stuff. And here, to my hand, was this incredible green leaf.

I left my chair and picked it up. It seemed to curl about my fingers with a life of its own. It was soft as the softest silk, and warm—like no other leaf I'd ever touched. The feel of it went through me like wine. I seemed to expand, to grow larger than my own self.

Clutching the leaf, I started toward the corpse. As I went the numbing chill that had paralyzed me before, laid hold of me again. And suddenly, as though the touch of the leaf had given my eyes new power, I thought I saw something wavering protectively over the dead body. I say "thought" because by now it was early dusk, and the misty shape I seemed to see was so intermingled with the gathering shadows that I could not be sure. Also, when I blinked my eyes to test their veracity, the vision disappeared.

I lifted up the shroud, and started to touch the leaf to the dead woman's face——

Icy fingers seemed to catch at my wrist! My hand was torn away!

"Will!"

It was like a shower of ice-cold water, that whip-like crack of my name sounding behind me. I gasped with the suddenness of it, combined as it was with the sheer terror that had crept through me at the fancied touch of those unseen fingers.

My hand opened convulsively. As though caught up by some invisible force, the leaf whirled out the window and was gone.

"Has anything happened to upset you?" asked my father, putting his hand anxiously on my shoulder.

"No," I mumbled. "No. Nothing at all has happened."

"I thought I saw something blow out of the window," he persisted. I made no answer.

Ab, meanwhile, was taking a last look at the woman who had helped and cared for him for so long.

"She's happier now, I reckon," he muttered. "She's with Patty, prob'ly, with our poor blind daughter. . . ."

I NEVER told them what had happened in that cabin. A kid of sixteen doesn't tell such things. He's too sure he'll be laughed at. It's only now, when I am

well along in years, that I dare to relate the affair and speculate about it.

Was the rat really dead? Possibly not; I am in no position to prove it. Did I merely imagine that wavering thing by the corpse, and the touch of those cold fingers? Perhaps; one's imagination is apt to work overtime during such a vigil. Could the spirit of the dead daughter have really been in that room, and did it first chase the rat and then clutch at my wrist in an effort to keep the mother from being resurrected? It sounds unbelievable.

The only fact that I can reiterate is that the leaf—in the midst of winter—was green. I saw it, held it in my hand. What would have happened had I touched it to the corpse? I don't *know*, of course, but I think . . . I think. . . .

Black Chant Imperial

By ROBERT E. HOWARD

Trumpets triumph in red disaster,
  White skulls litter the broken sod,
And we who ride for the one Black Master
  Howl at the iron gates of God.

Temples rock and the singers falter,
  Lights go out in the rushing gloom—
Slay the priest on his blackened altar,
  Rip the babe from the woman's womb!

Black be the night that locks around them,
  They who chant of the Good and Light,
Black be the pinions that shall confound them,
  Breaking their brains with a deadly fright.

Praised be the Prince that reigns forever
  Throned in the shadows stark and grim,
Where cypress moans by the midnight river—
  Lift your goblets and drink to him!

Virgins wail and a babe is whining
  Nailed like a fly on a gory lance;
White on the skulls the stars are shining,
  Over them sweeps our demon's dance.

Trumpets bray and the stars are riven!
  Shatter the altar, blot the light!
From the bursting hells to the falling heaven
  We are kings of the world tonight!

His Wild Dream Was Interwoven With Reality

The Phantom Bus

By W. ELWYN BACKUS

OUT of the vagueness of the half-dawn a dark bulk loomed to the accompaniment of a dull rumble. To Arthur Strite, waiting for his regular bus—the big, orange six-forty-five to the city—this nondescript contraption which usually preceded it by a minute or two seemed more like a ghostly coffin than a public conveyance. Its sweating black sides glistened oilily in the gray light as it passed him. A single dim incandescent lamp seen through the windows silhouetted stiffly nodding heads against the background of a dingy interior. Then the black bus was gone, swallowed up in the swirling December mist and fog.

As always, a feeling of odd disquiet possessed Strite with the passing of this conveyance—a fleeting impression of mystery, strangely repellent and defying description; of ill omen. What manner of passengers it carried or whence and whither it traveled, he did not know—and cared less. Yet, queerly enough, the affair had increasingly irritated and disturbed him ever since his moving to Emerymont three weeks before.

"Just an old junk-heap that loops out through Norwood and back over this direction," a fellow commuter said in answer to his question. Until this morning Strite had refrained from what he deemed the weakness of a query about this thing. For he had hesitated to give definite shape to his senseless disquiet by admitting any curiosity, even to himself. "I believe a couple of death-traps like that one comprise the company's entire rolling-stock," his informant finished.

"Oh," said Strite, mentally categorying the bus line with several that operated a sort of cross-country service between outlying sections of Cincinnati. Of course, he reflected, *some* concern had to serve this need. But he was conscious of a feeling of relief that he did not have to use that service.

Arthur Strite was boarding in Emerymont with the Ransons, not because of any liking for the make-believes, the rabble of bourgeoisie and scandalmongers that peopled the little suburb, but because he did enjoy the shrubbery and lawns and the quaintly designed houses, despite the crazy butting of garbage-can-studded back yards against living-room windows of adjoining homes. He minded his own business, displaying no curiosity in the neighbors or affairs of the place—which was one of the reasons why he had not discovered sooner the purpose of the bus line mentioned.

The night of the same day he had asked about the bus, he found himself pondering, with some intentness in the midst of an absent-minded perusal of the evening comic sheet, on the dingy conveyance that passed him each morning. Why should that silly bus thus intrude itself into his mind? He smiled self-indulgently and turned over to the sports page. The thing actually was becoming a nuisance! And for no logical reason. What should it matter to him how uninviting, how disagreeable a box on wheels those people rode in every morning?

Nevertheless, he dropped off to sleep thinking about the ghostly bus.

The same thing began to be the rule on the nights that followed. Always that ridiculous feeling of indefinable dread would come over him, would cling tenaciously to his thoughts from the moment he happened to think of having seen the shadowy bus that morning. He had half a notion to hail the confounded contraption some morning and see where it took him, just to dispel all this absurd air of mystery about it which had so unaccountably fastened upon him. Though perhaps there was some reason for his strange obsession after all. Not quite one year before, his fiancée, Doris Tway, had been killed in a terrible bus crash. He remembered the crumpled remains of the fatal bus, which he had seen afterward, vividly. It, too, had been black and shabby. An odd girl—she had always said that if she left first, she would return for him. Her idea of a joke, of course, but unusual.

In spite of his notion about hailing the other bus, Strite did not ride it—not for several weeks anyway, although its daily rumbling and jangling approach, made more eery by the shortening of the days, had driven that impression of weird mystery deeper than ever into his waking thoughts. Waking, because, so far, the dark bus had troubled him only during the evenings before he retired.

However, there came a night when he dreamed that he obeyed an impulse and boarded the strange bus!

He was conscious of a sickly odor as he entered the rickety door, which had slid back with a softness in strange contrast to the outward clatter of the conveyance. The vizor of the operator's cap was pulled well down over his face as he leaned over his levers. Strite felt the bus begin to move. Oddly, there was no vibration, none of the jarring rattle and bang he had expected. He might have been on a river barge, for all the motion he could feel. Startled more by this unnatural quiet than he could have been by the loudest of banging or jolting, he raised his eyes toward the occupants of the bus. Perhaps it was the strange effort this act seemed to impose upon him; at any rate, he awoke in that instant, seized by unreasoning, incomprehensible terror!

It was an hour before his taut nerves had relaxed enough to let him drop off to sleep—and not before he had vowed to ride that bus in fact the next morning.

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STRITE did not ride the black bus the next morning. It was nearly seven o'clock when he opened his eyes from a troubled sleep. This meant that he would be late to the office where he worked, on the other side of the city. Of course he missed his regular bus, and, with it, the other. Too, the daylight put a different aspect upon things. It would have been ridiculous, after all, to board a bus bound for another part of the city merely to humor a crazy impulse.

Yet, when that night came, Strite hesitated to go to bed. He told himself that he was hopeless, a fool and a coward. Then he undressed and resolutely turned out the light.

His hesitancy had not been unfounded. Again he found himself boarding the mysterious, sweating conveyance with its leaning operator and strange, illusive odor. And again a sudden, agonized awakening.

But this time he saw the other occupants before he awoke. They all—there were six of them—had their eyes closed as they sat nodding slightly with the almost imperceptible swaying of the bus. There was a repellent something about those faces, other than their closed eyelids, that struck a chill into Strite's heart. He wondered whether they were just weary, like him, or——

A cold finger touched his wrist. He managed to turn and face the operator. The latter, his face still hidden, was pointing to the fare box. Of course, these ill-built, ill-kept buses *would* reverse things by demanding their fare when one entered. He reached into his pocket for a dime, and in that moment caught sight of a seventh passenger, seated in front on the other side. The operator's head and shoulders had partly hidden her from him before, despite her slender tallness.

As his fingers found and automatically brought forth a dime, he observed that this passenger's eyes were not closed like the rest—that they were pale gray and staring at him. They were like—oh, God, it couldn't be—Doris! But it was—it was! How could he have failed to recognize her sooner, despite her position on the other side of the operator? Now he could understand why this bus had drawn him so strangely, irresistibly.

As he stared back at her, speechless with amazement, her eyes left his face, turned toward the windshield. Her pale lips twitched oddly, as if, mute with fear at what she saw there, she sought vainly to scream.

Then abruptly the spell was broken. She leaped to her feet, throwing one arm across her face in a gesture of one warding off some fearful harm. A shrill, hysterical scream pierced the quiet of that closed space like the stab of a knife!

That cry jarred Strite back to consciousness with a suddenness that jerked him upright in bed.

As he sat there trembling with the realism of his dream and that agonized scream, he became aware that he held something tightly in one closed hand. A fresh chill passed through his body at the familiar feel of that something. He needed no light to tell him that it was a dime he clutched—the dime he had been ready to drop in the fare box of his dream!

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OF COURSE he found that the coin evidently had fallen out of his vest when he sat on the bed while undressing. In fact, he usually kept some change in his vest pocket so as to have it handy for tips, newspapers, and such. Perhaps the accidental finding and touching of that coin in his slumbers had even started the train of thought that had made him dream of the fare box—and the other things. But there was no more sleep for Strite. After tossing about for the rest of the night, he got up about five o'clock.

This morning he was determined upon one thing. He would ride the black bus—"the phantom bus," as he had come to term it privately—this morning, and kill for once and all this persistent subconscious illusion that had taken root in his mind from the seed of his first absurd impression of the rickety conveyance in the eery light of half-dawn.

Once more his intention was to be defeated, however. The black bus failed to appear before the six-forty-five, though he had arrived at its stop more than a quarter-hour before it was due. He even waited for it ten minutes after his regular bus had gone—only to learn later that the other line finally had been discontinued.

His first reaction to this information was an overwhelming relief. No longer would he be reminded by this shadowy, rumbling hulk each morning, of things he wanted to forget.

But on the heels of this thought came the realization that the very discontinuance of the line had removed all chance of his ever killing the illusion if the latter continued to trouble him.

That day at noon as he walked along a downtown street a peculiar odor halted him. There was an illusive, dread familiarity about it. He was before a florist's open shop, and a great bowl of tuberoses, those once choice flowers for all those departed, was set out in front. He knew now where he had smelled their scent before—on the phantom bus of his dream.

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ONCE again Strite was in the phantom bus—in his subconscious mind. This time he knew exactly what was coming. He seemed powerless to change a single detail of it all. The pause just inside the doorway as he forced his gaze up to where the six passengers sat in plain view, their eyes closed, in death-like weariness or worse. The icy touch of a finger on his wrist, the reaching for a coin, and the discovery of the slender, tall girl up front. Doris!

At this point the sequence of events suddenly galvanized him into a feverish alertness for the next thing. As Doris' hysterical scream rang in his ears, he was abruptly released from the grip of immobility. He turned quickly and looked out of the front of the bus.

What he saw there made him throw up his hands in an involuntary gesture similar to her own instinctive gesture of terror. He heard the brakes squealing shrilly—felt the bus skid on the sleet-covered road even as he caught a side glimpse of the operator's face—saw with sudden added horror that half the face was missing. Beyond that fleeting glimpse, he had time for no further examination; for just ahead a heavily loaded truck was emerging from a narrow bridge-end, blocking their way. Then a terrific, rending crash. . . .

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THE six-forty-five bus was four minutes late on account of the icy condition of the roads; they had been that way for two days. A little group of commuters on the roadside were talking in subdued tones, for once unmindful of the delay as they waited.

"Personally," a pompous, red-faced man was saying, "I believe Ranson killed and—mauled—him for attentions to Mrs. Ranson."

"But Strite didn't appear to be that type," objected a young member of the group. "Nor is Mrs. Ranson the sort who would encourage him. Besides, consider the condition of the body. Why, Ranson or no one else could have so mangled another—to say nothing of leaving it in bed and persistently claiming that he didn't know how it happened, except that he and his wife were awakened in the middle of the night by a frightful cry—and found him that way! No, I say there is some deeper mystery about the affair, the nature of which we haven't suspected."

The big, orange-colored bus hove into view at this juncture, interrupting the discussion for the time. Presently they all had boarded it and found seats at various vantage-points. A little distance along the road one of them pointed out to his neighbor a twisted and splintered mass of wreckage at the foot of an embankment of the narrow bridge they were just then crossing.

"Lucky it jumped off when it struck—didn't even delay us yesterday when we followed a few minutes after it was discovered."

"Queer thing about how it got there," said the other. "Nobody witnessed the accident, and the defunct bus company's officials swear that the last they saw of their 'death trap' was when it was locked

away in an old garage on the other side of Norwood. Can you imagine any one swiping a can like that for a ride? But the present-day young coke-head will grab anything for a joy-ride."

"No queerer than that—that mess inside the wreck—as if some one had been crushed like—well, like poor Strite, for instance. Yet they could find no trace of a body!"

*Beyond the Door**

By **PAUL SUTER**

"YOU haven't told me yet how it happened," I said to Mrs. Malkin.

She set her lips and eyed me, sharply.

"Didn't you talk with the coroner, sir?"

"Yes, of course," I admitted; "but as I understand you found my uncle, I thought——"

"Well, I wouldn't care to say anything about it," she interrupted, with decision.

This housekeeper of my uncle's was somewhat taller than I, and much heavier—two physical preponderances which afford any woman possessing them an advantage over the inferior male. She appeared a subject for diplomacy rather than argument.

Noting her ample jaw, her breadth of cheek, the unsentimental glint of her eye, I decided on conciliation. I placed a chair for her, there in my Uncle Godfrey's study, and dropped into another, myself.

"At least, before we go over the other parts of the house, suppose we rest a little," I suggested, in my most unctuous manner. "The place rather gets on one's nerves—don't you think so?"

It was sheer luck—I claim no credit for it. My chance reflection found the weak spot in her fortifications. She replied to it with an undoubted smack of satisfaction:

"It's more than seven years that I've been doing for Mr. Sarston, sir: bringing him his meals regular as clockwork, keeping the house clean—as clean as he'd let me—and sleeping at my own home o' nights; and in all that time I've said, over and over, there ain't a house in New York the equal of this for queerness."

"Nor anywhere else," I encouraged her, with a laugh; and her confidences opened another notch:

"You're likely right in that, too, sir. As I've said to poor Mr. Sarston, many a time, 'It's all well enough,' says I, 'to have bugs for a hobby. You can afford it; and being a bachelor and by your-

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self, you don't have to consider other people's likes and dislikes. And it's all well enough if you want to,' says I, 'to keep thousands and thousands o' them in cabinets, all over the place, the way you do. But when it comes to pinnin' them on the walls in regular armies,' I says, 'and on the ceiling of your own study; and even on different parts of the furniture, so that a body don't know what awful thing she's a-goin' to find under her hand of a sudden when she does the dusting; why, then,' I says to him, 'it's drivin' a decent woman too far.' "

"And did he never try to reform his ways when you told him that?" I asked, smiling.

"To be frank with you, Mr. Robinson, when I talked like that to him, he generally raised my pay. And what was a body to do then?"

"I can't see how Lucy Lawton stood the place as long as she did," I observed, watching Mrs. Malkin's red face very closely.

She swallowed the bait, and leaned forward, hands on knees.

"Poor girl, it got on her nerves. But she was the quiet kind. You never saw her, sir?"

I shook my head.

"One of them slim, faded girls, with light hair, and hardly a word to say for herself. I don't believe she got to know the next-door neighbor in the whole year she lived with your uncle. She was an orphan, wasn't she, sir?"

"Yes," I said. "Godfrey Sarston and I were her only living relatives. That was why she came from Australia to stay with him, after her father's death."

Mrs. Malkin nodded. I was hoping that, by putting a check on my eagerness, I could lead her on to a number of things I greatly desired to know. Up to the time I had induced the housekeeper to show me through this strange house of my Uncle Godfrey's, the whole affair had been a mystery of lips which closed and faces which were averted at my approach. Even the coroner seemed unwilling to tell me just how my uncle had died.

"DID you understand she was going to live with him, sir?" asked Mrs. Malkin, looking hard at me.

I confined myself to a nod.

"Well, so did I. Yet, after a year, back she went."

"She went suddenly?" I suggested.

"So suddenly that I never knew a thing about it till after she was gone. I came to do my chores one day, and she was here. I came the next, and she had started back to Australia. That's how sudden she went."

"They must have had a falling-out," I conjectured. "I suppose it was because of the house."

"Maybe it was and maybe it wasn't."

"You know of other reasons?"

"I have eyes in my head," she said. "But I'm not going to talk about it. Shall we be getting on now, sir?"

I tried another lead:

"I hadn't seen my uncle in five years, you know. He seemed terribly changed. He was not an old man, by any means, yet when I saw him at the funeral——" I paused, expectantly.

To my relief, she responded readily: "He looked that way for the last few months, especially the last week. I spoke to him about it, two days before—before it happened, sir—and told him he'd do well to see the doctor again. But he cut me off short. My sister took sick the same day, and I was called out of town. The next time I saw him, he was——"

She paused, and then went on, sobbing: "To think of him lyin' there in that awful place, and callin' and callin' for me, as I know he must, and me not around to hear him!"

As she stopped again, suddenly, and threw a suspicious glance at me, I hastened to insert a matter-of-fact question:

"Did he appear ill on that last day?"

"Not so much ill, as——"

"Yes?" I prompted.

She was silent a long time, while I waited, afraid that some word of mine had brought back her former attitude of hostility. Then she seemed to make up her mind.

"I oughtn't to say another word. I've said too much, already. But you've been liberal with me, sir, and I know somethin' you've a right to be told, which I'm thinkin' no one else is a-goin' to tell you. Look at the bottom of his study door a minute, sir."

I followed her direction. What I saw led me to drop to my hands and knees, the better to examine it.

"Why should he put a rubber strip on the bottom of his door?" I asked, getting up.

She replied with another enigmatical suggestion: "Look at these, if you will, sir. You'll remember that he slept in this study. That was his bed, over there in the alcove."

"Bolts!" I exclaimed. And I reinforced sight with touch by shooting one of them back and forth a few times. "Double bolts on the inside of his bedroom door! An upstairs room, at that. What was the idea?"

Mrs. Malkin portentously shook her head and sighed, as one unburdening her mind.

"Only this can I say, sir: He was afraid of something—*terribly* afraid, sir. Something that came in the night."

"What was it?" I demanded.

"I don't know, sir."

"It was in the night that — it happened?" I asked.

She nodded; then, as if the prologue were over, as if she had prepared my mind sufficiently, she produced something from under her apron. She must have been holding it there all the time.

"It's his diary, sir. It was lying here on the floor. I saved it for you, before the police could get their hands on it."

I opened the little book. One of the sheets near the back was crumpled, and I glanced at it, idly. What I read there impelled me to slap the covers shut again.

"Did you read this?" I demanded.

She met my gaze, frankly.

"I looked into it, sir, just as you did—only just *looked* into it. Not for worlds would I do even that again!"

"I noticed some reference here to a slab in the cellar. What slab is that?"

"It covers an old, dried-up well, sir."

"Will you show it to me?"

"You can find it for yourself, sir, if you wish. I'm not goin' down there," she said, decidedly.

"Ah, well, I've seen enough for today," I told her. "I'll take the diary back to my hotel and read it."

I DID not return to my hotel, however. In my one brief glance into the little book, I had seen something which had bitten into my soul; only a few words, but they had brought me very near to that queer, solitary man who had been my uncle.

I dismissed Mrs. Malkin, and remained in the study. There was the fitting place to read the diary he had left behind him.

His personality lingered like a vapor in that study. I settled into his deep morris chair, and turned it to catch the light from the single, narrow window — the light, doubtless, by which he had written much of his work on entomology.

That same struggling illumination played shadowy tricks with hosts of wall-crucified insects, which seemed engaged

in a united effort to crawl upward in sinuous lines. Some of their number, impaled to the ceiling itself, peered quiveringly down on the aspiring multitude. The whole house, with its crisp dead, rustling in any vagrant breeze, brought back to my mind the hand that had pinned them, one by one, on wall and ceiling and furniture. A kindly hand, I reflected, though eccentric; one not to be turned aside from its single hobby.

When quiet, peering Uncle Godfrey went, there passed out another of those scientific enthusiasts, whose passion for exact truth in some one direction has extended the bounds of human knowledge. Could not his unquestioned merits have been balanced against his sin? Was it necessary to even-handed justice that he die face-to-face with Horror, struggling with the thing he most feared? I ponder the question still, though his body — strangely bruised — has been long at rest.

THE entries in the little book began with the fifteenth of June. Everything before that date had been torn out. There, in the room where it had been written, I read my Uncle Godfrey's diary:

"It is done. I am trembling so that the words will hardly form under my pen, but my mind is collected. My course was for the best. Suppose I had married her? She would have been unwilling to live in this house. At the outset, her wishes would have come between me and my work, and that would have been only the beginning.

"As a married man, I could not have concentrated properly, I could not have surrounded myself with the atmosphere indispensable to the writing of my book. My scientific message would never have been delivered. As it is, though my heart is sore, I shall stifle these memories in work.

"I wish I had been more gentle with her, especially when she sank to her knees before me, tonight. She kissed my hand. I should not have repulsed her so roughly. In particular, my words could have been better chosen. I said to her, bitterly: 'Get up, and don't nuzzle my hand like a dog.' She rose, without a word, and left me. How was I to know that, within an hour——

"I am largely to blame. Yet had I taken any other course afterward than the one I did, the authorities would have misunderstood."

AGAIN, there followed a space from which the sheets had been torn; but from the sixteenth of July, all the pages were intact. Something had come over the writing, too. It was still precise and clear—my Uncle Godfrey's characteristic hand—but the letters were less firm. As the entries approached the end, this difference became still more marked.

Here follows, then, the whole of his story; or as much of it as will ever be known. I shall let his words speak for him, without further interruption:

"My nerves are becoming more seriously affected. If certain annoyances do not shortly cease, I shall be obliged to procure medical advice. To be more specific, I find myself, at times, obsessed by an almost uncontrollable desire to descend to the cellar and lift the slab over the old well.

"I never have yielded to the impulse, but it has persisted for minutes together with such intensity that I have had to put work aside, and literally hold myself down in my chair. This insane desire comes only in the dead of night, when its disquieting effect is heightened by the various noises peculiar to the house.

"For instance, there often is a draft of air along the hallways, which causes a

rustling among the specimens impaled on the walls. Lately, too, there have been other nocturnal sounds, strongly suggestive of the busy clamor of rats and mice. This calls for investigation. I have been at considerable expense to make the house proof against rodents, which might destroy some of my best specimens. If some structural defect has opened a way for them, the situation must be corrected at once.

"July 17th. The foundations and cellar were examined today by a workman. He states positively that there is no place of ingress for rodents. He contented himself with looking at the slab over the old well, without lifting it.

"July 19th. While I was sitting in this chair, late last night, writing, the impulse to descend to the cellar suddenly came upon me with tremendous insistence. I yielded — which, perhaps, was as well. For at least I satisfied myself that the disquiet which possessed me has no external cause.

"The long journey through the hallways was difficult. Several times, I was keenly aware of the same sounds (perhaps I should say, the same *impressions* of sounds) that I had erroneously laid to rats. I am convinced now that they are mere symptoms of my nervous condition. Further indications of this came in the fact that, as I opened the cellar door, the small noises abruptly ceased. There was no final scamper of tiny footfalls to suggest rats disturbed at their occupations.

"Indeed, I was conscious of a certain impression of expectant silence — as if the thing behind the noises, whatever it was, had paused to watch me enter its dominion. Throughout my time in the cellar, I seemed surrounded by this same atmosphere. Sheer 'nerves,' of course.

"In the main, I held myself well under control. As I was about to leave the cellar, however, I unguardedly glanced back over my shoulder at the stone slab covering the old well. At that, a violent tremor came over me, and, losing all command, I rushed back up the cellar stairs, thence to this study. My nerves are playing me sorry tricks.

"July 30th. For more than a week, all has been well. The tone of my nerves seems distinctly better. Mrs. Malkin, who has remarked several times lately upon my paleness, expressed the conviction this afternoon that I am nearly my old self again. This is encouraging. I was beginning to fear that the severe strain of the past few months had left an indelible mark upon me. With continued health, I shall be able to finish my book by spring.

"July 31st. Mrs. Malkin remained rather late tonight in connection with some item of housework, and it was quite dark when I returned to my study from bolting the street door after her. The blackness of the upper hall, which the former owner of the house inexplicably failed to wire for electricity, was profound. As I came to the top of the second flight of stairs, something clutched at my foot, and, for an instant, almost pulled me back. I freed myself and ran to the study.

"August 3rd. Again the awful insistence. I sat here, with this diary upon my knee, and it seems that fingers of iron are tearing at me. I will not go! My nerves may be utterly unstrung again (I fear they are), but I am still their master.

"August 4th. I did not yield, last night. After a bitter struggle, which must have lasted nearly an hour, the desire to go to the cellar suddenly departed. I must not give in at any time.

"August 5th. Tonight, the rat noises (I shall call them that for want of a more appropriate term) are very noticeable. I went to the length of unbolting my door and stepping into the hallway to listen.

After a few minutes, I seemed to be aware of something large and gray watching me from the darkness at the end of the passage. This is a bizarre statement, of course, but it exactly describes my impression. I withdrew hastily into the study, and bolted the door.

"Now that my nervous condition is so palpably affecting the optic nerve, I must not much longer delay seeing a specialist. But—how much shall I tell him?

"August 8th. Several times, tonight, while sitting here at my work, I have seemed to hear soft footsteps in the passage. 'Nerves' again, of course, or else some new trick of the wind among the specimens on the walls.

"August 9th. By my watch it is four o'clock in the morning. My mind is made up to record the experience I have passed through. Calmness may come that way.

"Feeling rather fatigued last night, from the strain of a weary day of research, I retired early. My sleep was more refreshing than usual, as it is likely to be when one is genuinely tired. I awakened, however (it must have been about an hour ago), with a start of tremendous violence.

"There was moonlight in the room. My nerves were 'on edge,' but, for a moment, I saw nothing unusual. Then, glancing toward the door, I perceived what appeared to be thin, white fingers, thrust under it—exactly as if some one outside the door were trying to attract my attention in that manner. I rose and turned on the light, but the fingers were gone.

"Needless to say, I did not open the door. I write the occurrence down, just as it took place, or as it seemed; but I can not trust myself to comment upon it.

"August 10th. Have fastened heavy rubber strips on the bottom of my door.

"August 15th. All quiet, for several nights. I am hoping that the rubber strips, being something definite and tangible, have had a salutary effect upon my nerves. Perhaps I shall not need to see a doctor.

"August 17th. Once more I have been aroused from sleep. The interruptions seem to come always at the same hour—about three o'clock in the morning. I had been dreaming of the well in the cellar—the same dream, over and over—everything black except the slab, and a figure with bowed head and averted face sitting there. Also, I had vague dreams about a dog. Can it be that my last words to her have impressed that on my mind? I must pull myself together. In particular, I must not, under any pressure, yield, and visit the cellar after nightfall.

"August 18th. Am feeling much more hopeful. Mrs. Malkin remarked on it, while serving dinner. This improvement is due largely to a consultation I have had with Dr. Sartwell, the distinguished specialist in nervous diseases. I went into full details with him, excepting certain reservations. He scouted the idea that my experiences could be other than purely mental.

"When he recommended a change of scene (which I had been expecting), I told him positively that it was out of the question. He said then that, with the aid of a tonic and an occasional sleeping-draft, I am likely to progress well enough at home. This is distinctly encouraging. I erred in not going to him at the start. Without doubt, most, if not all, of my hallucinations could have been averted.

"I have been suffering a needless penalty from my nerves for an action I took solely in the interests of science. I have no disposition to tolerate it further. From today I shall report regularly to Dr. Sartwell.

"August 19th. Used the sleeping-draft last night, with gratifying results. The doctor says I must repeat the dose for

several nights, until my nerves are well under control again.

"August 21st. All well. It seems that I have found the way out—a very simple and prosaic way. I might have avoided much needless annoyance by seeking expert advice at the beginning. Before retiring, last night, I unbolted my study door and took a turn up and down the passage. I felt no trepidation. The place was as it used to be, before these fancies assailed me. A visit to the cellar after nightfall will be the test for my complete recovery, but I am not yet quite ready for that. Patience!

"August 22nd. I have just read yesterday's entry, thinking to steady myself. It is cheerful—almost gay; and there are other entries like it in preceding pages. I am a mouse, in the grip of a cat. Let me have freedom for ever so short a time, and I begin to rejoice at my escape. Then the paw descends again.

"It is four in the morning—the usual hour. I retired rather late, last night, after administering the draft. Instead of the dreamless sleep, which heretofore has followed the use of the drug, the slumber into which I fell was punctuated by recurrent visions of the slab, with the bowed figure upon it. Also, I had one poignant dream in which the dog was involved.

"At length, I awakened, and reached mechanically for the light switch beside my bed. When my hand encountered nothing, I suddenly realized the truth. I was standing in my study, with my other hand upon the doorknob. It required only a moment, of course, to find the light and switch it on. I saw then that the bolt had been drawn back.

"The door was quite unlocked. My awakening must have interrupted me in the very act of opening it. I could hear something moving restlessly in the passage outside the door.

"August 23rd. I must beware of sleeping at night. Without confiding the fact to Dr. Sartwell, I have begun to take the drug in the daytime. At first, Mrs. Malkin's views on the subject were pronounced, but my explanation of 'doctor's orders' has silenced her. I am awake for breakfast and supper, and sleep in the hours between. She is leaving me, each evening, a cold lunch to be eaten at midnight.

"August 26th. Several times I have caught myself nodding in my chair. The last time, I am sure that, on arousing, I perceived the rubber strip under the door bent inward, as if something were pushing it from the other side. I must not, under any circumstances, permit myself to fall asleep.

"September 2nd. Mrs. Malkin is to be away, because of her sister's illness. I can not help dreading her absence. Though she is here only in the daytime, even that companionship is very welcome.

"September 3rd. Let me put this into writing. The mere labor of composition has a soothing influence upon me. God knows, I need such an influence now, as never before!

"In spite of all my watchfulness, I fell asleep, tonight—across my bed. I must have been utterly exhausted. The dream I had was the one about the dog. I was patting the creature's head, over and over.

"I awoke, at last, to find myself in darkness, and in a standing position. There was a suggestion of chill and earthiness in the air. While I was drowsily trying to get my bearings, I became aware that something was nuzzling my hand, as a dog might do.

"Still saturated with my dream, I was not greatly astonished. I extended my hand, to pat the dog's head. That brought me to my senses. I was standing in the cellar.

"The thing before me was not a dog!

"I can not tell how I fled back up the

cellar stairs. I know, however, that, as I turned, the slab was visible, in spite of the darkness, with something sitting upon it. All the way up the stairs, hands snatched at my feet."

THIS entry seemed to finish the diary, for blank pages followed it; but I remembered the crumpled sheet, near the back of the book. It was partly torn out, as if a hand had clutched it, convulsively. The writing on it, too, was markedly in contrast to the precise, albeit nervous penmanship of even the last entry I had perused. I was forced to hold the scrawl up to the light to decipher it. This is what I read:

"My hand keeps on writing, in spite of myself. What is this? I do not wish to write, but it compels me. Yes, yes, I will tell the truth, I will tell the truth."

A heavy blot followed, partly covering the writing. With difficulty, I made it out:

"The guilt is mine — mine only. I loved her too well, yet I was unwilling to marry, though she entreated me on her knees — though she kissed my hand. I told her my scientific work came first. She did it, herself. I was not expecting that—I swear I was not expecting it. But I was afraid the authorities would misunderstand. So I took what seemed the best course. She had no friends here who would inquire.

"It is waiting outside my door. I *feel* it. It compels me, through my thoughts. My hand keeps on writing. I must not fall asleep. I must think only of what I am writing. I must——"

Then came the words I had seen when Mrs. Malkin had handed me the book. They were written very large. In places, the pen had dug through the paper. Though they were scrawled, I read them at a glance:

"Not the slab in the cellar! Not that! Oh, my God, anything but that! Anything——"

By what strange compulsion was the hand forced to write down what was in the brain; even to the ultimate thoughts; even to those final words?

THE gray light from outside, slanting down through two dull little windows, sank into the sodden hole near the inner wall. The coroner and I stood in the cellar, but not too near the hole.

A small, demonstrative, dark man — the chief of detectives — stood a little apart from us, his eyes intent, his natural animation suppressed. We were watching the stooped shoulders of a police constable, who was angling in the well.

"See anything, Walters?" inquired the detective, raspingly.

The policeman shook his head.

The little man turned his questioning to me.

"You're quite sure?" he demanded.

"Ask the coroner. He saw the diary," I told him.

"I'm afraid there can be no doubt," the coroner confirmed, in his heavy, tired voice.

He was an old man, with lack-luster eyes. It had seemed best to me, on the whole, that he should read my uncle's diary. His position entitled him to all the available facts. What we were seeking in the well might especially concern him.

He looked at me opaquely now, while the policeman bent double again. Then he spoke—like one who reluctantly and at last does his duty. He nodded toward the slab of gray stone, which lay in the shadow to the left of the well.

"It doesn't seem very heavy, does it?" he suggested, in an undertone.

I shook my head. "Still, it's stone," I

demurred. "A man would have to be rather strong to lift it."

"To lift it—yes." He glanced about the cellar. "Ah, I forgot," he said, abruptly. "It is in my office, as part of the evidence." He went on, half to himself: "A man — even though not very strong—could take a stick—for instance, the stick that is now in my office—and prop up the slab, if he wished to look into the well," he whispered.

The policeman interrupted, straightening again with a groan, and laying his electric torch beside the well.

"It's breaking my back," he complained. "There's dirt down there. It seems loose, but I can't get through it. Somebody'll have to go down."

The detective cut in, "I'm lighter than you, Walters."

"I'm not afraid, sir."

"I didn't say you were," the little man snapped. "There's nothing down there, anyway — though we'll have to prove that, I suppose." He glanced truculently at me, but went on talking to the constable: "Rig the rope around me, and don't bungle the knot. I've no intention of falling into the place."

"There *is* something there," whispered the coroner, slowly, to me. His eyes left the little detective and the policeman, carefully tying and testing knots, and turned again to the square slab of stone.

"Suppose—while a man was looking into that hole—with the stone propped up — he should accidentally knock the prop away?" He was still whispering.

"A stone so light that he could prop it up wouldn't be heavy enough to kill him," I objected.

"No." He laid a hand on my shoulder. "Not to *kill* him—to *paralyze* him —if it struck the spine in a certain way. To render him helpless, but not unconscious. The *post mortem* would disclose that, through the bruises on the body."

The policeman and the detective had adjusted the knots to their satisfaction. They were bickering now as to the details of the descent.

"Would that cause death?" I whispered.

"You must remember that the housekeeper was absent for two days. In two days, even that pressure"—he stared at me hard, to make sure that I understood —"with the head down——"

Again the policeman interrupted: "I'll stand at the well, if you gentlemen will grab the rope behind me. It won't be much of a pull. I'll take the brunt of it."

We let the little man down, with the electric torch strapped to his waist, and some sort of implement—a trowel or a small spade—in his hand. It seemed a long time before his voice, curiously hollow, directed us to stop. The hole must have been deep.

We braced ourselves. I was second, the coroner last. The policeman relieved his strain somewhat by snagging the rope against the edge of the well, but I marveled, nevertheless, at the ease with which he held the weight. Very little of it came to me.

A noise like muffled scratching reached us from below. Occasionally the rope shook and shifted slightly at the edge of the hole. At last the detective's hollow voice spoke.

"What does he say?" the coroner demanded.

The policeman turned his square, dogged face toward us.

"I think he's found something," he explained.

The rope jerked and shifted again. Some sort of struggle seemed to be going on below. The weight suddenly increased, and as suddenly lessened, as if something had been grasped, then had managed to elude the grasp and slip away. I could catch the detective's rapid

breathing now, also the sound of inarticulate speech in his hollow voice.

The next words I caught came more clearly. They were a command to pull up. At the same moment, the weight on the rope grew heavier, and remained so.

The policeman's big shoulders began straining, rhythmically.

"All together," he directed. "Take it easy. Pull when I do."

Slowly, the rope passed through our hands. With each fresh grip that we took, a small section of it dropped to the floor behind us. I began to feel the strain. I could tell from the coroner's labored breathing that he felt it more, being an old man. The policeman, however, seemed untiring.

The rope tightened, suddenly, and there was an ejaculation from below—just below. Still holding fast, the policeman contrived to stoop over and look. He translated the ejaculation for us.

"Let down a little. He's stuck with it against the side."

We slackened the rope, until the detective's voice gave us the word again.

The rhythmic tugging continued. Something dark appeared, quite abruptly, at the top of the hole. My nerves leapt in spite of me, but it was merely the top of the detective's head — his dark hair. Something white came next — his pale face, with staring eyes. Then his shoulders, bowed forward, the better to support what was in his arms. Then——

I looked away; but, as he laid his burden down at the side of the well, the detective whispered to us:

"He had her covered up with dirt—covered up. . . ."

He began to laugh — a little, high cackle, like a child's—until the coroner took him by the shoulders and deliberately shook him. Then the policeman led him out of the cellar.

IT WAS not then, but afterward, that I put my question to the coroner.

"Tell me," I demanded. "People pass there at all hours. Why didn't my uncle call for help?"

"I have thought of that," he replied. "I believe he did call. I think, probably, he screamed. But his head was down, and he couldn't raise it. His screams must have been swallowed up in the well."

"You are sure he didn't murder her?" He had given me that assurance before, but I wished it again.

"Almost sure," he declared, "though it was on his account, undoubtedly, that she killed herself. Few of us are punished as accurately for our sins as he was."

One should be thankful, even for crumbs of comfort. I am thankful.

But there are times when my uncle's face rises before me. After all, we were the same blood; our sympathies had much in common; under any given circumstances, our thoughts and feelings must have been largely the same. I seem to see him in that final death march along the unlighted passageway — obeying an imperative summons—going on, step by step—down the stairway to the first floor, down the cellar stairs—at last, lifting the slab.

I try not to think of the final expiation. Yet *was* it final? I wonder. Did the last Door of all, when it opened, find him willing to pass through? Or was Something waiting beyond *that* Door?

THE stories of Clark Ashton Smith have aroused tremendous enthusiasm in our readers. Mr. Smith, whose poetry has been one of the brightest features of WEIRD TALES, is now hailed by many as a new find in the fiction world because of the high literary quality and compelling fantasy of his short tales in this magazine.

V. P. Miner, of Sacramento, California, writes to the Eyrie: "Just a note of appreciation, nothing more; a man and his work—no matter how great his tasks—must occasionally be compelled to pause now and then and listen for echoes. Lately I have come upon a story now and then by Clark Ashton Smith. I believe you have recognized an artist and put him to work. His stories have care; there are beauty and art in every line. His imagination is distinct; the mystery of his background is amazing. And within it all there exists a philosophy. I believe you have reached out among the thousands of present-day writers and placed your hands on a real 'find'. I desire to express the kind sentiments of this household for the rich hours of entertainment that the stories in WEIRD TALES have given us."

A letter from Frank L. Pollock, of Shedden, Ontario, says: "In looking over a copy of your magazine I came upon quite an extraordinary story called *The Last Incantation,* by Clark Ashton Smith. I have reread it several times, and can not refrain from writing you to remark upon its very unusual literary quality. It has, in fact, the very quality of Poe at his best—with perhaps a touch of Lord Dunsany."

"The 'hot seat' wraith story in the June issue was well done," writes H. G. Rowell of New York City. "Evidently the author had been there or talked with some one who had. The autopsy incision clinched the truth of the thing. I judge Sing Sing was meant."

Writes Brush Hatcher of Honolulu, in a letter to the Eyrie: "Permit me to pen a word of compliment for Seabury Quinn on his clever, amusing Jules de Grandin stories. He presented a well-handled theme in *The Brain-Thief*. He manages dialogue dexterously. You ask your readers to report on the story they preferred in the last issue. *The End of the Story* by Clark Ashton Smith struck me as deserving the medal of honor in the May edition. Smith writes easily, compactly and without affectation. He has a nice selection of detail, a neat logical plot, and a delightful manner of exposition. I shall be pleased to read more of his stories."

"I have eagerly secured every issue of WEIRD TALES since I was first introduced to it about a year ago by a friend," writes H. E. Nenzel, of Dundalk, Maryland. "Hav-

ing seen many readers request reprints of H. P. Lovecraft's works, I was all excited when I saw that you had reprinted *The Rats in the Walls*. For sheer weirdness and horror this story is hard to beat. Lovecraft is the best of them all, and I would like to see more reprints of his earlier works, as I missed most of them when first published. The scientific stories by Edmond Hamilton are by far the best I have read anywhere, especially his stories about the adventures of the Interstellar Patrol. Your magazine satisfies me in every way as I have always been an avid reader of uncommon stories."

Ron H. Donachy, of Kane, Pennsylvania, rushes to the defense of the cover designs, which have been severely criticized in the Eyrie in recent issues. "While reading in the Eyrie of the June issue the excellent letter of Bernard Austin Dwyer of Kingston," he writes, "I hit upon one portion thereof in which I do in no way agree with the gentleman named. This is in regard to the cover designs, so unjustly termed raw, rank sex appeal by Mr. Dwyer. Why should not the public mind run along the above named channels, when we know that we are so beautifully and wonderfully made; and who has become so unseeing that he can not behold beauty and charm in the symmetry of the human form *en nude?* Does it not portray weird temptation, allurement and mystery of itself? Or perhaps does Mr. Dwyer expect you to portray as a cover design the loathsome horror of Mr. Lovecraft's *Dunwich Horror* or his *Silver Key*, or perhaps the terrible phantoms of *The Planet of Horror* in the June issue, and have the public turn sick with revulsion from the very sight thereof? No! no! a thousand times no! For my part I am perfectly satisfied with the cover designs, and can conceive of no way where any change would be an improvement in the least. I will agree with H. P. Stiller of New York, that H. P. Lovecraft's *Dunwich Horror* is truly a classic, worthy of being preserved for posterity, as likewise is his *Silver Key*, of which much of the subject matter therein I deem a true history of the mental processes of the present race and age; and I believe that next or equal to these two great works of Lovecraft is *The Hounds of Tindalos* by Frank Belknap Long, Jr., published about a year ago. I have read these three stories over at least half a dozen times, and I assure you that when I desire to read something with a thrill and a deep mystery that I can find nowhere else, I again turn to one of these works; for with each reading I always find something there that I hadn't seen before."

R. Gage, of Vancouver, British Columbia, writes to the Eyrie: "I am not going to read any more of your magazines if I find any more of those queer French names like in *The Brain-Thief* by S. Quinn. If I liked to hear French names I'd live in France. Also, I think your stories are not so much weird as they are crazy."

"The June issue was certainly fine, probably because it contained a de Grandin story," writes Edwin Beard, of St. Louis. "When will I cease to rave over that mythical man? And I do not, as a certain gentleman suggested in the Eyrie, rave over him because others do. I think for myself, now and always. I would like to read more for WEIRD TALES. My personal opinion, and all my professors count it worthy of consideration, is that your magazine has more literary merit for the price than any magazine printed which is devoted chiefly to fiction."

Readers, what is your favorite story in this issue? The most popular story in the July number, as shown by your votes, was the last installment of *The Moon of Skulls*, the Solomon Kane story by Robert E. Howard. *The Bride of Dewer*, by Seabury Quinn, was a close second to Mr. Howard's story.

stories of the Overlord of Cornwall by Doctor Keller. I enjoyed them immensely, especially *No Other Man*. *The Planet of Horror* fell flat for me. It strove to reach the blood-freezing heights attained in *The Space-Eaters* but failed utterly. I like my horrors concrete most of the time, abstract only once in a while. *The Rats in the Walls* was certainly chilling, especially the last two columns. Please reprint *The Infidel's Daughter* or *The Woman of the Wood*. They are nothing less than classics. I am simply wild over stories like *The Girl From Samarcand*. I hope more are printed. And *what* has become of Greye La Spina? I never see his (or is it her?) stories any more." [A new serial by Greye La Spina will begin in our October issue—THE EDITORS.]

"I thought the last issue of WEIRD TALES a particularly strong one," writes Clark Ashton Smith. "The gruesome stories, such as *In the Borderland* and *The Frog*, were especially good. But of course the real event was the reprint of Lovecraft's *The Rats in the Walls*. I was pleased to see a story by Long announced for the next issue. Long has a rare imaginative gift and a distinctive style that is beholden to nobody."

"Do you ever get letters from bona fide English teachers?" writes Don C. Hilsinger, of St. Louis, Michigan. "I am one myself, but I am not one of those teachers who believe that no literature was written before or after Shakespeare. Neither do I avow Browning to have been the last real poet. In fact, my favorite poets and authors are not all dead and what is more I defend them against the invectives of my professors. On several occasions I have mentioned WEIRD TALES only to have it scorned as only a Ph. D. in English can scorn a magazine. Then one day I saw the list of stories that this Ph. D. was teaching in his short-story class. Ha ha ha! I had read several of them in WEIRD TALES and I told him so. He registered a very operatic expression of surprize and said, 'Is that so?' Then he proceeded to ponder on the subject for a while and finally gave his decision to the effect that if you published in your monthly reprint section such stories as the ones I mentioned, the rest of your stories would have to be good too, or your readers would object to them by comparison. Score six

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Another Dracula

(Continued from page 336)

they stopped directly under my window —I could have hit them with a shoe."

"Why didn't you?"

"Because I preferred to sit and watch them. Didn't want to scare them away."

"But why didn't you shoot them?"

"The farmer for whom I worked didn't let any of the farmhands keep guns. So the two lions finally trotted off again into the woods."

"But that wasn't the adventure you were going to tell me about, was it?" asked Mary, a bit disappointedly.

"No," replied Crane. "The adventure happened the following night. Again I was lying awake listening to the cries of the pair, as they called to each other from range to range. And again the two animals met between the farm and the lake. But this time their cries then ceased. What silent devilment were they up to, I wondered? And then I heard the pump stop. It was my turn to go down to the lake and fix it."

"You poor dear," murmured Mary. "How old were you?"

"Only eleven. Naturally I was scared to death, but I had to go, for it was my turn. I begged each of the other farmhands, one by one, to go with me, but they all refused; so I lit a lantern and set off alone through the woods. Not a sound from the mountain lions. If only they would howl, so that I could tell where they were, and what they were up to! But they kept absolutely silent. Somehow I reached the lake shore, got the pump going again, and started back up the road toward home. I was just beginning to recover from my stupor of abject terror, when upon rounding a curve of the path, I saw in front of me two green spots of phosphorescent light. Instantly I stopped dead in my tracks, absolutely petrified."

"I can well believe it," interjected the girl. "You poor little kid!"

Dr. Crane continued: "And then the beast came toward me. At least I judged that he was coming toward me, for the two phosphorescent eyes seemed to get wider and wider apart. In an attempt at frightening him, I swung my lantern widely—and the lantern went out. I was alone in the darkness with that thing up the road. Yet still the two spots of light glowed, even though there was now no lantern for them to reflect. Instinctively I felt that this was strange, but I was too scared to do any real thinking on the subject. Wider and wider apart got the two eyes. 'What a huge beast this must be!' I thought. From a distant ridge there came the blood-curdling scream of a lion. Fascinated, I waited for the beast in front of me to answer its mate. But the answer came from an entirely different quarter, far away. 'Can there be *three* of them?' I wondered. And then, with a flash of inspiration, I stepped fearlessly forward, right between the two eyes which were facing me. They were nothing but two glow-worms crawling on the dirt of the road."

"Well of all the yarns!" exclaimed Mary, a bit exasperated. "Here I have been getting up a lot of sympathy for you, and you weren't any more in danger of being eaten alive than I am right now."

"But I really was frightened, terribly so," protested the young doctor, a bit apologetically.

THERE was a pause, while the two sat and watched the moonlight on the gently swaying treetops of the mountainside.

Then Mary asked, "You have spoken of the terrifying scream of the mountain lions. What was it like? Can you describe it to me?"

"That's a pretty big order," laughed the young doctor, "for a lion's scream is different from anything else I have ever heard. It's just simply horrible—makes the hairs stand up on the back of your neck, and brings out goose-pimples all over your body. The nearest thing to it that I ever heard was a little child once, shrieking with pain in a hospital. It's—it's——"

As he paused, groping in his mind for a simile, the calm night air was split by one single ghostly shriek, coming from the woods just below them on the mountainside.

Mary's pale face turned even paler, as she sat suddenly erect in her chair and convulsively gripped the doctor's arm.

"What—what was that, Ralph?" she gasped.

"That," replied he, "was a mountain lion."

Tensely the two of them awaited a repetition of the sound. But it never came. That single fearsome howl was the only one.

Gradually they relaxed again.

"What will you do?" asked the girl solicitously. "I can't bear to have you go home through the woods, now that this has happened. You might meet that—that awful thing. And I'm scared to be left here alone with only the Fosses. You must stay with me, Ralph. Spend the night. Please do. Mrs. Foss can fix you up a cot somehow."

So Dr. Crane spent the night in Mary Morton's little mountain cabin.

6. *Bats and Other Things*

OF COURSE, when Herman Fulton learned that the attractive young doctor had spent the night in Mary Mor-

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ton's cabin, he was furious. Even the fact of the presence of Mr. and Mrs. Foss in the cabin, as chaperones, did not in the least mitigate his anger.

His fiancée had been compromised! He himself had been made ridiculous! To a banker or businessman there is nothing worse than ridicule. Many a man would let his business go to smash rather than run the risk of ridicule to save it; and here was ridicule to no practical end. Why, it might even result in a run on the bank!

The only way to save his face was to take some drastic action at once. Accordingly he did. He asked Dr. Crane to withdraw from the case; and when the doctor refused to withdraw, Herman fired him. Herman was in a position to do this, as he was paying the bills. Old Dr. Porter was placed in charge, instead.

The reason for the change, as given out to such persons as had any right to ask, was that Dr. Crane had unduly terrified his patient by getting her off in a lonely shack in the mountains and then telling her ghost stories. Indeed, Mary was so frightened by that single unexplained piercing scream of a mountain lion, that she insisted on being moved back to civilization the very next day. Altogether, everything fitted in to make Herman's explanation sound most plausible. And really Dr. Crane was open to considerable censure for telling Mary the lion story in her condition and location.

He accepted his removal gracefully, and conferred lengthily with his successor, who brought a new viewpoint to the situation.

Old Dr. Porter, after a rather cursory examination of Mary Morton and a study of the case-history, announced, "This acute anemia appears to me to be due to some cause which we haven't yet fathomed. You were probably taught at Harvard Medical that anemia is a *disease*, but the more modern theory seems to be that it is a mere *symptom*, the result of one of a large number of varying causes, many of which have been run to earth, but many more of which still remain unexplained."

The younger doctor agreed.

"I'll admit," said he, "that you older men are apt to be more progressive than our generation. We accept as gospel truth what we were taught at the school, whereas you have been out in practise long enough to realize how little is really known of the human body. Hence you are more open-minded to new ideas than we. Have you any theory as to the underlying cause of Miss Morton's symptoms?"

"Not yet," replied Dr. Porter judiciously, "but I believe that I have at least discerned the group in which her ailment falls. Her bloodlessness seems to me to be due to some organism, some creature that is sapping her strength. I shouldn't wonder——"

He paused with a bit of embarrassment, and then went on, "You know, years ago when I was a young man just out of college, I made a trip to the Argentine. One of the horses, on a ranch where I was visiting, was taken ill. It grew weak and emaciated. During the daytime it would eat ravenously and seem to pick up strength. But every morning it would be weak again. I was frankly puzzled, and was interested in the case from a medical viewpoint, although I had never felt any leanings toward veterinary practise. But my host merely shrugged his shoulders, and accepted the situation with Spanish fatalism. Also he did not seem to care to discuss the case. Whenever I broached the subject, he would avoid it with a bit of a shudder, and would make the sign of the cross. Most of the ranch-hands acted the same way about the matter. Finally one of the cowboys, not quite so

superstitious as the others, led me to the horse one evening, and pointed out a huge bat—'vampire-bats' they call them—clinging to the horse's neck, sucking its life-blood."

"There has been such a bat around Yankton all summer," interrupted young Crane. "Can it be——?"

"Let me go on with my story," persisted Dr. Porter. "The bat fled before I could get my hands on it. I at once inquired why they didn't keep the bat away, but the cowboy replied, 'It is not possible, *señor*, for once a vampire marks its victim, the victim is doomed.' But I myself am not a fatalist. I insisted on putting the poor horse at once into a carefully screened shed. Nevertheless the bat got in and out, and the horse continued to fail. We blocked every hole, but we could not cope with the fiendish ingenuity of that vampire. So, as a last resort, I persuaded my friend the cowboy—by means of *'mucho dinero'*—to sit up with the horse and guard it at night; to try and shoot the bat, if he got a chance."

"Did that work?"

"Yes, it did for a while. The cowboy didn't even see the bat again. The horse rapidly gained in strength, and I was just about to taunt the Argentinos that the vampire was not as omnipotent as they seemed to think, when one morning I found the cowboy asleep, and the horse dead, drained nearly bloodless!"

"But, doctor," objected Crane, "if anything like that were happening to Mary, she would know it, and there would be marks on her throat."

"Are you sure that there aren't marks on her throat?" demanded the older man, pointedly.

"N-n-no!" admitted Crane. "Have you observed any?"

"I haven't looked," Dr. Porter replied. "This idea hadn't occurred to me when I first examined her. And now, frankly, I

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don't care to disturb her, in her present nervous condition. Nor, for the same reason, have I mentioned bats to her. But we shall keep a careful watch, from now on."

"Well, to be equally frank with you, sir," asserted young Crane, "I don't place much stock in your bat theory. But there have been a great many strange carryings-on in Yankton this summer, and nothing would surprize me very much. Certainly we don't yet know what is the underlying cause of Miss Morton's illness."

So Dr. Porter, following out his hunch, next interviewed Mary's father on the subject.

"You haven't seen any vampire-bats around the house, have you?" he asked abruptly.

Pop Morton's jaw dropped, for he suddenly remembered Herman's weird theories.

"Vamp—vampire what?" he gasped.

It was Dr. Porter's turn to become surprized, for Pop's confusion was clearly indicative of something.

"Why, what do you mean?" asked the doctor.

"Nothing. Nothing," asserted Pop, much embarrassed. "No, I haven't seen any bats at all."

And nothing more could Dr. Porter pump out of him, except the repeated assertion that he hadn't seen any bats. Nor did Pop mention the conversation to Herman Fulton until much later.

MARY continued to waste away, recovering a bit sometimes for a week or so at a stretch, only to fall still lower the next time that a relapse set in.

Meanwhile Dr. Crane's patients steadily deserted him, one by one. It soon became evident to the young doctor that Herman Fulton, not content with removing him from the Morton case, was insidiously and persistently bringing to bear the bank's influence to drive him out of town, until at last the day came when the young doctor was unable to meet a payment on the mortgage on his own establishment, and was refused an extension by the banker.

Fulton then placed his cards on the table by offering a handsome settlement for the equity, if Dr. Crane would move out of town; and so Dr. Crane moved.

For some time past, one of the New York hospitals had been angling for Dr. Crane's services, and now he accepted the offer.

Herman magnanimously permitted him to say good-bye to Mary. The farewell was touching, though brief. Not a word was said to let the girl know that Crane was the victim of her fiancé's jealousy.

"I've a splendid opening in New York," reported the young doctor, "and so I am reluctantly leaving Yankton to take it. But the real impelling reason is that New York will give me an opportunity to read up on anemia, and I hope to find out some way of curing you. If I succeed, I shall be very glad that I left. In any event, please remember that I shall always be your devoted friend. Please, please call on me, if you ever need help."

Seizing her hand, he held it tightly for a moment, and then left abruptly. There were tears in the eyes of both of them.

IMMEDIATELY on his arrival at his new job, Dr. Crane hunted up the member of the hospital staff who was supposed to know the most about anemia; and through his suggestions, plunged into a line of evening reading in the medical alcove of the New York Public Library.

He wrote Mary Morton once—merely a brief note, giving her his address, and expressing a hope that she was better.

It was not long before a solution of Mary's case began to dawn on him. He found that, as old Dr. Porter had stated,

the modern trend of opinion is that anemia is always secondary. He found, to his surprize, that even more of the primary causes of that disease had been worked out and pinned down than Dr. Porter had intimated.

The enthusiastic young researcher compared each of the known features of the girl's case-history with the ear-marks of each of these various primary causes, one by one, until at last he hit upon what seemed to him to be unquestionably the uniquely correct solution.

Dr. Porter had been very nearly right in his surmise. There was now a chance to save Mary. So Ralph Crane rushed off the following letter by special delivery:

Dr. Jeremiah Porter,
Yankton, Pa.

My dear old friend,

I believe that I have at last hit upon the underlying cause of Miss Morton's condition. Her symptoms, her case-history, and the situation at Yankton seem to fit the specifications exactly. You were quite right in your hunch that she is the victim of a parasitic organism, but I do not believe that it is a vampire-bat.

The books describe a form of anemia, very similar to hers, and often found in mining communities. It is due to a parasitic worm, the *ankylostomum duodenale,* which inhabits damp places, especially underground mines.

The symptoms are very similar to those of pernicious anemia, for which we have been treating her; that is to say, successive remissions and relapses, with the nervous symptoms very marked.

May I suggest *santonin* for a time, in place of *blaud?*

Let me know how the dear girl is.

Respectfully,
RALPH CRANE, M. D.

Then anxiously he awaited an answer. It came back two days later by wire:

Diagnosis too late. Mary died Monday. Funeral three o'clock tomorrow.

J. PORTER.

7. *Haunted*

IT WAS already "tomorrow" when the telegram arrived, announcing Mary Morton's death. Crane, stunned and heartbroken by the news, hailed a taxicab and rushed to the Pennsylvania station,

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only to find that there was no train which could possibly get him to Yankton in time for the funeral. So he sent some flowers by telegraph, and gave himself up to an afternoon of bitter recrimination.

He had failed the girl he loved. Oh, if he had but worked faster and to more purpose, and had found out the cause of her trouble before that knowledge was too late to save her! Of course, his diagnosis might not be correct; and even if correct, it might not have enabled him to cure her. But there had been a chance, and that chance was now lost forever.

Later a letter arrived from Dr. Porter, but it didn't throw much more light on the situation. Marks and blood had been found on Mary's throat, but the girl had insisted that they had been due to her scratching a particularly vexatious wood-tick bite, which she had acquired in the mountain cabin. A constant guard had been set over her, but no bat or other animal had approached her, except a stray black cat which had jumped over her bed on the day of her death. The huge gray bat had been seen around town occasionally, but not near the Morton house. It all sounded rather banal and silly, when set down in black and white on paper; but, in view of the previous conference between the two doctors, Dr. Porter said that he felt duty-bound to state all these details. He expressed no opinion about the *ankylostomum duodenale,* except to thank Dr. Crane for the suggestion, and to express an appreciation for the younger man's zeal, persistency and thoroughness at research. All of which was most unsatisfying.

Young Crane was crushed, stunned and broken-hearted. His Mary was dead! His Mary was dead!

At last he realized that what he had mistaken for merely warm affection for the girl, had really been love. Oh, if he had but realized this in time!

It was his fault! Her death was all his fault! He ought to have asserted himself, have declared his love, and have dragged her away from Yankton to New York, where she could have had adequate medical attention.

For about a week, he drove his numbed brain and weary body. During working hours, his hospital duties afforded him some measure of forgetfulness of his grief; but at night there was no relief. He walked many miles every evening. Then he would lie awake in bed, the prey of bitter recrimination, until at last sleep came, but not oblivion, for even his sleep was tortured by dreams of what might have been.

And then one night, about midnight, he suddenly awakened with a feeling that there was someone in his room. He was thoroughly frightened, even before he started to awake; and yet he could not remember any dream which could be responsible for this feeling. Merely he waked up already scared, and with no apparent cause.

The room was quite light from the reflection of an advertising sign near by, and so he could distinctly see everything in the room. By the foot of the bed there stood a young girl clad in white, smiling down on him.

It was Mary—or Mary's ghost! But it couldn't be her ghost, for there are no such things as ghosts. So it must be Mary herself. But Mary was dead. But she couldn't be dead, for here she was. What was she doing in New York City? And in his room! And at this time of night! His Mary, at last! Could it be true?

"Mary!" he gasped.

"Yes, Ralph," the figure replied, "it is Mary. I have come to you for help, because Herman doesn't seem to understand. Night after night I have tried to

get Herman to help me; but he only cringes, and makes the sign of the cross, and says horrid things to me, which I don't understand. He calls me 'undead'. Of course I'm undead! I'm alive, as alive as you are; but somehow he says the word 'undead' as though it meant something else, something terrible and unclean. I can't understand him, and he refuses to understand me. But you will help me, won't you? You promised me, you know."

"Of course I'll help you, Mary dear!" he exclaimed. "But what are you doing in New York? Just step into my sitting-room for a moment, until I get some clothes on."

She smiled wanly.

"I'm not in New York, Ralph," she replied. "I'm buried six feet deep in a cold dark grave in the Yankton cemetery. But I'm not dead. I'm sure of that. Sometimes I lie for hours in that awful padded coffin. Sometimes I sleep. Sometimes I lose my head, and shriek and struggle in the darkness, trying to tear the box away and get out. And sometimes I think very calmly and steadily of some place, usually Herman's room, until suddenly I find myself there. Then I plead with him to help me; but he repulses me, and drives me back into the grave again. I feel that I can't stand it much longer. Either my strength or my wits will give out, and then I shall be really dead."

It was quite clear to Dr. Crane that the poor girl was out of her mind. She had probably been in a cataleptic trance, had escaped from the coffin on the very eve of burial, and had closed and locked the box, perhaps even filling it with books so that her absence would not be noticed. Insane people are quite often diabolically clever in such ways. He remembered, from his recent extensive reading, that anemia often results in either catalepsy or

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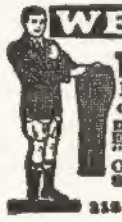

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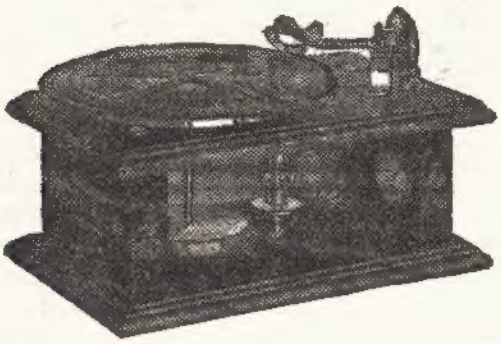

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insanity, so why not both? It was the only plausible solution!

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As the young doctor groped in his mind for soothing words to quiet her hysteria, she spoke again, "You will help me, won't you, Ralph? I frighten poor dear Herman so! He is beginning to get pale and anemic just like I was. Last night he had another man sleeping with him, and so I can't go there any more. It embarrasses me."

"Of course I'll help you," reassured Dr. Crane. "Now if you'll just sit down for a moment in the next room, I'll be right with you."

"Thank you, Ralph," said she. "Goodbye. Come quickly! Very quickly!"

He rubbed his eyes. She was no longer there! And yet he had not seen her leave the room.

Dr. Crane got up and dressed, and walked the streets of New York until morning. He did not dare to go to sleep again, and thus establish the possibility that he had merely dreamed what had just happened to him.

He was standing eagerly on the steps of the Public Library when it opened at nine o'clock. As the doors were unlocked, he rushed to the medical stacks, where he plunged into a new line of reading, namely, "cataleptic trances."

By noon a smile of grim determination had settled over his features, and he had wired to Dan Callahan, the Yankton taxi-driver, to meet him at the Limited.

The startling events at the opening of Mary Morton's grave will be described in the closing chapters of this story in next month's WEIRD TALES.

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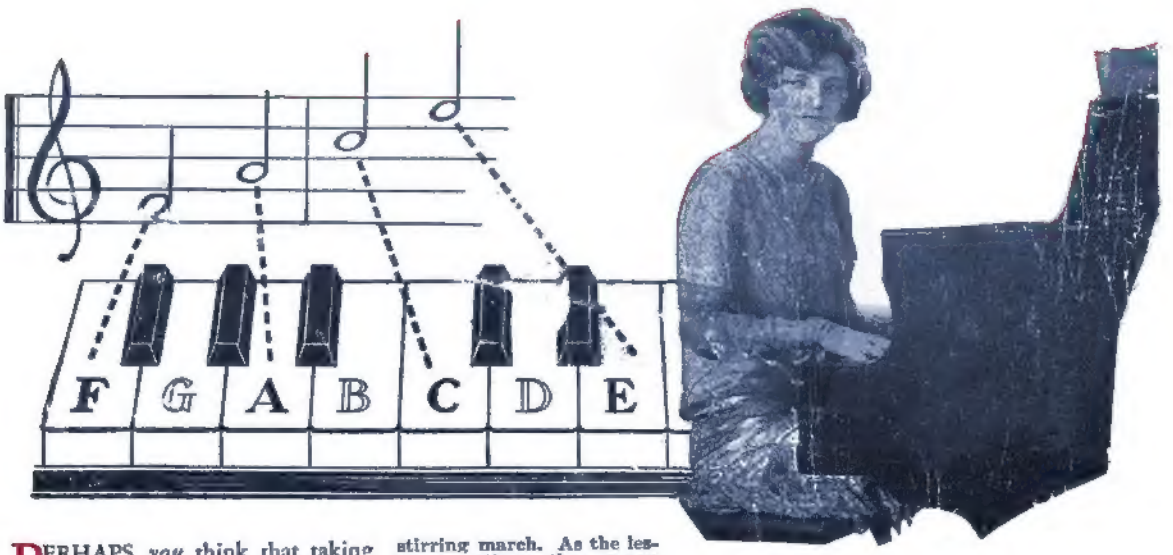

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